THE MAN AND HIS WORD

Reflections on the life and legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala

Simon L Amin

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"We have heard Fr. Ukelo saying; It is time that we need to forgive ourselves because he was born in war, he grew up and studied in war, he became a priest during war; he served for fifty (50) years seeing people dying, children hungry, women being raped, and all kinds of atrocities that are happening in our country. And they have not stopped happening today even to the extent of making the house of God a place where we divide ourselves. Division has entered the house of God. But he has not kept quiet. Because his words has ever been, and his motto, 'Let your Yes be Yes and No be No,' Shukran ya Abuna Ukelo wa ajili Baraka al ita wosulu lanna."[1]

[1] Fr. Gabriel Asida, Homily During the Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, *Fr. Barnaba Deng House, Comboni Missionaries – Moroyok,* (23 July, 2022).

Table of Contents

Foreword v

Acknowledgment vi

Dedication vii

1. Introduction 1
2. Background 2
3. History of South Sudan 6
4. History of the Comboni Missionaries in South Sudan 17
5. Impacts of the Two Historical Backgrounds on Ukelo. 22
6. The Pari People 25
7. Yes, Yes! No, No! 31
8. Missing but Alive; Listen to his testimony 34
9. A Very Happy Missionary 36
10. Making a Beautiful Community 39
11. Lover of People 40
12. Treat People Humanly 43
13. Imprisoned but Unmoved 47
14. Relationship with the Government 49
15. A Victim of Racism 50
16. Narrowly Escaped Death 52
17. A Very Strict and Principled Priest 54
18. The Grace of God Working in His Life 56
19. Insights into His Motto (Mt. 5:37) 58
20. Why He Chose Mt. 5:37 As His Motto 60
21. Poems in Honor of Fr. Ukelo 61
22. Legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala 70
23. Personality from the Psychological Take 72
24. The Man and His Word 75
25. Lamentation and Farewell to Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala 76
26. Conclusion 77
27. Indexes 79

i. Testimonies 79

ii. Drama Performed in his honour 82

iii. Map of Lafon (Inhabitance of the Pari People) 84
iv. Map of Sudan and South Sudan 85
v. Missions of the Comboni Missionaries 86
vi. Photos of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala 86
28. Bibliography vii

Foreword

By the virtue of living around Fr. Ukelo as a Christian closer to the altar, and to have read the writing effort of Mr. Simon Lodai Aminson & other references cited, I am confident to write the following, considerate of all circumstances;

1) Ukelo was indeed a beautifully truthful figure; his truth as an elder wasn't felt as bitter as some phrases might say. All the truths out of him was so ultimate, a leverage for mentorship & radical change surrounded with tones of fatherly love.

2) The writing's plagiarism and textual or common spelling errors can pass with 90% observation, though I might not be a machine, open for corrections.

3) The devotion time made on incepting the idea of the book, the research, scripting footnotes and other computerized formatting is amazing and must be commended.

4) The written presentation style is attractive, not just plain write-ups, but a writing project with an art of a captivating storyteller and a gifted writer. More so, a propagator of Faith; missionary by writing.

Conclusively, I can say it's an articulated style of witnessing to the values and principles of the Risen Christ through human exemplary lives lived around us. "Haha hallelujah... Christ living in us" through book making. Well-done for the efforts exerted herein and after. Best wishes and may the Holy Spirit do the rest as we have done our best; seemingly our best is a dot in the Creator's zone, but with Him, all is well.

An Accomplish!! Amen

Immanuel Boniface

December 20, 2025

Acknowledgment

It is with gratitude to God that I extend my humble thanks to all those who have afforded me time, materials, financial help, guidance and other aids which contributed to the realization of this book. It has not been an easy exploration of the life of a man whose legacy is not only in the minds but lives of the people, not on any material except two biographical books.

In a special way, I thank my mother Sabina Ityak Daniel through whose help I am able to reach this far with the academic journey. Her thoughts, discipline and counseling continues to resonate in my intellect, spraying my mind with a sweet aroma of a caring mother.

I register sincere thanks to Immanuel Boniface who proofread this work with care, and skillful analysis. His comments (in the foreword) encouraged me to move forward with this publication. He is a living witness of a life lived with Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala as well as listening to him.

I recognize the efforts the Comboni Missionaries are making to assist me in my philosophical studies. Moreover, I acknowledge in a particular way Fr. Guido Oliana, MCCJ (may his soul rest in peace) whose insights in the biographical works: "*Lover of People*" and "*Autobiography of Fr. Joseph Ukelo*" has been a major point of reference for the success of this book. The Comboni missionaries continue to serve the people of South Sudan amidst challenges; internal, external and civil setbacks. Yet, they try to forge a direction of prosperity for the common good of the people of South Sudan; serving in areas where there are inadequate government services. Their zeal, dedication and missionary endeavors do not only focus on evangelization but the promotion of human dignity through hospitals, education, peace and justice among others.

It will be inconsiderate to forget the Pari Community (Lafon), whose cultural heritage, traditions and customs produced a great mind and personality.

Dedication

To my beloved mother, Sabina Ityak Daniel; heroine of my life, my role model, and my guide. Your unwavering strength, boundless love, and enduring wisdom have shaped who I am today. This book is dedicated to you, with deep gratitude and admiration.

To the Pari Community, whose rich cultural heritage and resilient spirit have been a source of inspiration to Fr. Ukelo. May his legacy be a transformative tool in your community.

To the Comboni Missionaries, whose commitment to service and faith exemplifies the highest ideals of missionary work. Your dedication continues to inspire and uplift communities across the world.

This book is a tribute to the legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala and to all who strive to live a life of purpose, compassion, and unwavering faith.

1. Introduction

The story of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala emerges as a testament to faith's transformative power. His life is a rich story intertwined with threads of sacrifice, wisdom, and unyielding love. It reflects the deep impact of one man dedicated to a higher calling. As we delve into "*The Man and His Word: Reflections on the Life of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala*," we are invited to explore a journey marked by both extraordinary achievements and profound personal trials.

This reflection builds from the historical perspectives, which provided strong grounds for Ukelo, to deep analysis of various aspects of his life. We shall explore the history of South Sudan, Comboni Missionaries in South Sudan and the Pari people while showing how they impacted Ukelo's journey.

Direct interviews and my personal experience with him will shape different aspects of this work. I have personally dedicated ten poems to Ukelo. Poetry speaks to the heart, drills tears and pours them on a piece of paper from a heart broken by sorrow yet built by hope. I have used different poetry styles to write including free verse.

As we journey through these pages, we encounter not only a man whose life was a testament to service and reform but also a spiritual leader whose wisdom continues to resonate. His legacy, captured in the hearts of those he touched, speaks of a profound commitment to truth, compassion, and the transformative power of genuine faith.

This book is both a tribute and a reflection; a celebration of a life lived in the service of others and a profound meditation on the lessons learned from a man whose words and deeds have left an indelible impact on all who knew him. As we explore the life and legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, this work offers a reflective journey through his contributions to faith, community, and justice. It provides an intimate look into the struggles and triumphs of a man whose impact resonates deeply within the Catholic Church and beyond.

His story is a testament to the enduring power of faith, the strength of compassion, and the transformative effect of a life lived in service to others. Through these reflections, we honor not only the man himself but also the enduring principles that guided his journey.

2. Background

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala was born into the Pari community of Eastern Equatoria State, South Sudan, a region known for its vibrant traditions and cultural richness. His early years were shaped by the deep-rooted values and communal spirit of the Pari people, who, despite historical and socio-political challenges, have preserved their heritage with resilience and pride. This cultural backdrop significantly influenced Fr. Joseph's approach to his priestly vocation and missionary work.

Many people who lived in his time, together with him or indirectly had contact with him, can testify to the personality of this great man of God. Being a public figure, he has a wider audience. Through his preaching, apostolates, life, exhortations as well as practical engagement in the community, he holistically impacted many as a shepherd of the flock of Christ. He was born, studied, ordained and ministered to people during terrible moments of political instability in the country.

A man of profound love and interest in humanity, Ukelo loved and embraced the gospel values. He used them to spearhead his dictum and advocacy for truth. According to the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus' official website:

> Joseph was born in Lafon, diocese of Juba,[2] South Sudan, on 1 January 1939, to Peter Yala and Anna Acan, parents of 10 children, five sons and five daughters. He was baptised and confirmed by Father Cesare Gambaretto in 1951. He attended primary school in his native village, then entered the minor seminary of Okaru (Torit, Eastern Equatoria). He then moved to the Major Seminary of Tore (Yei, Central Equatoria) for some time, but the seminarians were forced to flee due to the dramatic political situation. During their escape, they met some Comboni missionaries who were about to leave South Sudan after the expulsion decree from the Khartoum government (1964). Joseph spent a year in Kit (near Juba), but then reached Uganda where he completed his training at the Major Seminary of Lacor. And it was here that he matured his Comboni missionary vocation. In December 1967, he was sent to Florence for two years of novitiate. On 9 September 1969, he took his first religious vows and was sent to the scholasticate in Verona for the first two years of philosophy.[3]

This is a person born during the onset of the second world war. A time when human rights violations heightened, crimes against humanity ignored and the League of Nations failed to

[2] During that time, the current diocese of Torit was under the diocese of Juba. It is in this context that Fr. Joseph was born.

[3] Comboni Missionaries, n.d. *In Pace Christi.* Accessed 8 14, 2024. https://www.comboni.org/en/fratelli/106601.

prevent the escalating second world war. We are aware that this was the aftermath of the first world war, in which 6 million Jewish people were killed given the hostile anti-Semitism of the time.

It is by God's grace that Fr. Joseph met the Comboni missionaries eventually leading to the discovery of his vocation to become a Comboni Missionary. The political situation appears to remain dramatic. However, this situation from a positive angle can be seen to have contributed to the discovery of a missionary vocation in this young man. One question a person can ask is, "what if they were not to meet the already leaving Comboni missionaries, would he become a Comboni missionary?" However, at this point, one still has to submit to God's will that "*God's ways are far from our own ways and so do his thoughts*" (Cf Isaiah 55:8-9). Although it is a question of importance, it is becoming evident how God begins to work in the life of Fr. Joseph; to draw him to Himself.

God hooked Ukelo from the situation he was in, in order to make him voice of the voiceless. To give him a golden mouth that would forever change the story of a people living under oppression of the Khartoum government. After his philosophical studies, Ukelo was sent to study theology:

> In 1970 he went to the international scholasticate in Rome to complete his theological training at the Pontifical Urban College of 'Propaganda Fide'. On 23 April 1972, he was ordained a priest in the church of Sant'Andrea, in Tivoli, by Bishop Guglielmo Giaquinta. Shortly afterwards, he left Italy, destined for South Sudan, where, for a few months, he was vice-rector of the minor seminary of the diocese of Torit. At the end of 1973, he was assigned to the Terekela mission. From 1974 to 1977 he was deputy parish priest of Nalingoro-Kapoeta. In 1977 he was assigned to Mupoi as spiritual director of the Missionary Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He remained there until 1982. In January 1983 he was sent to the Comboni province of Italy, assigned to the community of Bari for the missionary animation service of the diocese. In July 1986 he was sent to Eldoret, Kenya, for a pastoral course at the AMECEA Ggaba Pastoral Institute. In July 1987, the bishop of Torit, Msgr. Paride Taban, chose him as the Vicar General of the diocese, but he had to reside in Juba for security reasons.
>
> In July 1991, he went to Kampala, Uganda where he ministered at the parish of Mbuya. On 1 January 1995, he was sent to South Africa, to the mission of Elukwatini, in the diocese of Witbank. For an entire year, he was engaged in studying the language and was then appointed local superior of the Comboni community, working in the apostolate and missionary animation. In 2004 he moved to the parish of Barberton, in the same diocese, but in July he had to go to Nairobi (Kenya) for medical treatment. Three months later, he returned to South Sudan, to Lomin. The following year he was elected provincial councillor.
>
> In 2006 he went to Rome for a refresher course, then, for a year and a half, he had to stay in Verona, at the Centre for the Sick, for medical treatment. He then returned to South Sudan

> and was again Vicar General of the diocese of Torit, based in Juba. In 2011 he went to stay at the Comboni House in Juba, in charge of ministry. In March 2016, he retired to Moroyok (Juba), to the prepostulancy community. There he spent his last years, until his return to the Father's house on 19 December 2023.[4]

Indeed, this was a missionary journey. He gathered experience from different parts of the world. These very experiences shaped his life to the last day. A Comboni missionary testified of him:

> "'Joseph had many human qualities' – writes Father Guido Oliana in his biography of Father Joseph – which he put at the service of his vocation as a Comboni missionary priest. He was a person who fearlessly said what he thought and believed. A man of principle. He always showed great courage in denouncing the injustices committed by the Arab government of Khartoum against the South Sudanese, risking his life several times. He was a man of great humanity. He had great leadership qualities and a great sense of responsibility. He had a profound spirituality, which showed in his spirit of prayer, patience and humility. He was also a committed priest, who intensely loved his religious consecration and his priestly identity." (Father Franco Moretti, mccj)[5]

During my Prepostulancy at Fr. Barnaba Deng House, Moroyok; he told us a lot of things. One day they were asked to fast during Christmas in the novitiate. Even though his colleagues did refrain from meals that time, Ukelo enjoyed the meals properly. He was not afraid of any disciplinary or formative measures. He believed people must stand for what is right rather than follow instructions with blind obedience. The right thing done with the right intention commits nothing to the flame.

As a Comboni missionary, he has worked in South Africa where he facilitated the construction of a church building for the parish there. During his Golden jubilee celebration, a lady whom he has helped in that parish testified to the greatest work and legacy Fr. Joseph left there.

One day our formator in the Prepostulancy, Fr. Alfred Mawadri[6] who was the Superior of the House, told us how obedient Fr Joseph was. Even in his old age, he does not hesitate to do whatever he was asked. He does not complain a lot in respect of his priestly duties. That

[4] Comboni Missionaries, n.d. *In Pace Christi.* Accessed 8 14, 2024. https://www.comboni.org/en/fratelli/106601.

[5] Comboni Missionaries, n.d. *In Pace Christi.* Accessed 8 14, 2024. https://www.comboni.org/en/fratelli/106601.

[6] Comboni Missionaries, 2022. *Uganda - News.* 3. Accessed 8 17, 2024. https://www.comboni.org/app-data/img/Contenuto/dettaglio/114341.jpg.

is why one has to be careful about what to tell him. He is a missionary who is ready to do his mission at any time.

It is of awe to see an 84-year-old Fr. Joseph participating actively in the Community activities. He makes the community lively. When he is well, he rarely misses Morning prayers, evening prayers and the Holy Mass. He entertains us with stories and cracks jokes.

Phrases such as, “It no good…”! were amusing to us. He is quick to remember his motto. In one of the evening gathering of birthday celebrations in the community, I asked him of any biblical verse he could remember with the passage. It did not take 15 seconds before he could spell out, “Mathew 5:37 – let your yes be yes and no be no…” This was surprising for an 84-year-old priest to remember so quickly.

There should be some wonder as to what really motivated Ukelo to be as bold and fearless since he was in formation. As much as he is praised for his obedience, Fr. Joseph was a missionary who stands out for his strictness. As much as he was compromising, Fr Joseph does not tolerate what is bad. He challenges whatever bad thing he sees.

In his life as a Comboni Missionary, Ukelo has been described as the lover of people. He is deeply in love with the people he serves wherever he is. The people of South Africa where he served remembered him forever. The missionary sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary remember him for his guidance as their spiritual father. The people of the diocese of Torit vividly remember him for the length of time he served in the diocese making significant changes. Each person he touched, remember Ukelo for the seed he planted; which we must watch, water and grow through his life and legacy.

We should know that Ukelo did not fall from the blue, he was born in a culture and civilization. We shall now proceed to briefly point out the major aspects that make up the history of South Sudan, the Comboni Missionaries as well as the Pari community. We shall then show how these backgrounds shaped his life and missionary vocation.

3. History of South Sudan

The history of South Sudan is one which evolved from ancient civilizations and diverse cultures. The region now known as South Sudan has been inhabited for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence suggests that the area was home to early human civilizations, including the Nubian kingdoms that flourished along the Nile River. Ancient Nubian cultures, such as the Kingdom of Kush, had a profound influence on the history of northeastern Africa, including parts of present-day South Sudan.

It should be noted that one cannot speak of the history of South Sudan without mentioning Sudan. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica:

> "The earliest inhabitants of what is now Sudan can be traced to African peoples who lived in the vicinity of Khartoum in Mesolithic times (Middle Stone Age; 30,000–20,000 BCE). They were hunters and gatherers who made pottery and (later) objects of ground sandstone. Toward the end of the Neolithic Period (New Stone Age; 10,000–3,000 BCE) they had domesticated animals. These Africans were clearly in contact with predynastic civilizations (before c. 2925 BCE) to the north in Egypt, but the arid uplands separating Egypt from Nubia appear to have discouraged the predynastic Egyptians from settling there."[7]

It has been noted that Sudan is one of the richest African countries in terms of archaeological sites.[8] It is in Sudan that the ruins of the ancient kingdom of Kush are found at Gebel Barkal and associated sites in the Nile valley; they were collectively designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003.[9] The archaeological sites at Meroe, an ancient Kushitic city, were collectively designated a World Heritage site in 2011.[10]

According to the World Heritage Center Website,

> "The Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe, a semi-desert landscape between the Nile and Atbara rivers, was the heartland of the Kingdom of Kush, a major power from the 8th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. The property consists of the royal city of the Kushite kings at Meroe, near the River Nile, the nearby religious site of Naqa and Musawwarat es Sufra. It was the seat of the rulers who occupied Egypt for close to a century and features, among other vestiges, pyramids, temples and domestic buildings as well as major

[7] M. el Din Sabr, Economist Intelligence Unit, Collins, Robert O, Spaulding, Jay L, Al-Shahi, Ahmed S. and Sikainga, Ahmad Alawad. "Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 14, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan.

[8] M. el Din Sabr, et al, "Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* August 14, 2024.

[9] M. el Din Sabr, et al, "Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* August 14, 2024.

[10] M. el Din Sabr, et al, "Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* August 14, 2024.

> installations connected to water management. Their vast empire extended from the Mediterranean to the heart of Africa, and the property testifies to the exchange between the art, architectures, religions and languages of both regions."[11]

The Kingdom of Kush, with its capital at Meroë, was a significant political and cultural power from the 8th century BCE to the 4th century CE. This kingdom, known for its advanced civilization and monumental architecture, played a crucial role in regional trade and cultural exchanges with Egypt and the surrounding areas.

Following the decline of Kush, the region saw the rise of various indigenous tribes and kingdoms. Among these were the Shilluk, Dinka, Nuer, and other Nilotic peoples, whose complex societies and rich cultural traditions continue to shape South Sudan's identity today. These groups developed intricate systems of governance, social organization, and spirituality that have endured through centuries of change.

Colonial Era

The modern history of South Sudan began to take shape with the arrival of European colonial powers in the late 19th century. In 1898, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was established, bringing Southern Sudan under British-Egyptian administration. This period marked the beginning of significant political and social changes in the region.

It is discovered that the Anglo-**Egyptian rule** took shape from 1898 to 1956 AD which became effective:

> After the suppression of the Mahdiya, the British Empire and Egypt formally shared the governance of Sudan. On the ground, Sudan was a British colony. Horatio Herbert Kitchener became governor general of Sudan in 1898. Reginald Wingate succeeded him only a year later. The development of Sudan proceeded unevenly under colonial rule. North and south were administered as separate provinces of the condominium. Investment focussed on the north, developing infrastructure and economy. Telegraph and railway lines were extended to link key points, but services did not reach more remote areas. Port Sudan opened in 1906, replacing Suakin as the country's principal port on the Red Sea. In 1911, the British administration and the private Sudan Plantations Syndicate launched the Gezira Scheme, a large-scale irrigation project which was to bring large tracts of land between the Blue and the White Niles south of Khartoum under cultivation. It made cotton – then destined for Britain's textile industry – the mainstay of the Sudanese economy, and turned the region into Sudan's most densely populated area. In 1943, the British began preparing the north for self-

[11] UNESCO. n.d. "Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe." *UNESCO World Heritage Sites*. Accessed 8 17, 2024. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1336/#:~:text=The%20Archaeological%20Sites,of%20both%20regions.

> government. In 1946, they reversed this policy, deciding to integrate north and south Sudan under one government.[12]

Under colonial rule, South Sudan was governed as part of the larger Sudanese territory. The British implemented policies that often disregarded the traditional social structures and governance systems of the indigenous peoples. This era saw the imposition of new administrative practices, the introduction of cash crops, and the establishment of infrastructure that linked South Sudan to the broader Sudanese economy.

One of the most significant legacies of this period was the policy of "indirect rule," which involved ruling through local leaders while imposing British administrative structures. This approach often created tensions and conflicts between traditional authorities and the colonial administration.

Path to Independence

The quest for autonomy and independence began to gain momentum in the mid-20th century. In 1955,[13] just before Sudan gained independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, an armed conflict erupted between the northern and southern regions of Sudan. This conflict, driven by ethnic and cultural differences, laid the groundwork for the long-standing civil strife that would follow:

> The Mutiny of the Equatoria Corps On August 18, 1955, against the Northern Sudanese officers and men at Torit marked the beginning of North-South hostilities. The mutiny was the culmination of frustration after many years of discrimination by Northern Sudanese officials. Southern grievances were compounded by the Sudanese government's refusal to grant federal status to the South. It was in light of these circumstances that the people of Southern Sudan took up arms to fight for self-determination.[14]

[12] n.d. "Anglo-Egyptian Rule." Discover Sudan. Accessed 8 17, 2024. https://discoversudan.de/en/sudan/history/anglo-egyptian-rule#:~:text=1898%20to%201956,under%20one%20government.

[13] 2024. "First Sudanese Civil War." *Wikipaedia*. 7 28. Accessed 8 17, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Sudanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20First%20Sudanese,year%20long%20war.

[14] S. S. Poggo, Legacy of the Failed Mutiny. In: The First Sudanese Civil War. *Palgrave Macmillan*, New York. (2009): https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230617988_4

The First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972)[15] was characterized by clashes between the Sudanese government, predominantly based in the north, and the southern rebels who sought greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural and political rights. The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 briefly brought peace and autonomy to the south, but this period of relative stability was short-lived.

This was because, Nimeiri violated the agreement:

> The terms of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which ended the first Sudan Civil War, were violated several times. In 1978, president Gaafar Nimeiry wanted to take control of the newly-discovered oil fields located on the border region between north and South Sudan. In 1983, President Nimeiry violated the agreement by imposing Sharia Law across the nation and abolishing the mostly Christian Southern Sudan Autonomous Region. Most South Sudanese people and other people who were non-Muslim living in the north were now punished by Sharia Law. In response, rebels from South Sudan formed the Southern Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), led by John Garang, to fight the central government in Khartoum. As in the first war, child soldiers were recruited by both sides but were more frequently used by the SPLA. In April 1985, a coup occurred. Nimeri was ousted and the new government rescinded his 1983 decree and made other overtures designed to reconcile the north and south. In May 1986, the new Khartoum government led by Prime minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and the SPLA led by Col. John Garang met in negotiations for the first time. At the same time the SPLA and other Sudanese political parties met in Ethiopia where they fashioned the Koka Dam declaration which called for abolishing Islamic law and convening a constitutional conference for the entire nation.[16]

In 1983, the Second Sudanese Civil War erupted, fueled by grievances over the government's attempts to impose Islamic law and disregard for southern autonomy.

> The Second Sudanese Civil War was an intense 22-year conflict between the central government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The war started in southern Sudan but spread to other places including the Nuba mountains and the Blue Nile region. Two million people died in this conflict but the war also led to the creation of South Sudan as an independent nation in 2011.[17]

This conflict was marked by intense fighting, widespread suffering, and significant loss of life. The war lasted until 2005, when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was

[15] 2024. "First Sudanese Civil War." *Wikipaedia*. 7 28. Accessed 8 17, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Sudanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20First%20Sudanese,year%20long%20war.

[16] Samuel Momodu, 2018. "Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005)." BlackPast. 12 23. Accessed August 17, 2024. https://www.blackpast.org

[17] Samuel Momodu, 2018. "Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005)." BlackPast. 12 23. Accessed August 17, 2024. https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/events-global-african-history/second-sudanese-civil-war-1983-2005/#:~:text=The%20Second%20Sudanese,nation%20in%202011.

signed, granting South Sudan a degree of self-governance and paving the way for a referendum on independence.

Independence and Post-Independence Struggles for South Sudan

On July 9, 2011, South Sudan officially gained independence from Sudan,[18] becoming the world's youngest nation. The new country's independence was celebrated with high hopes for peace and prosperity. The national Anthem was composed and everyone was taught to sing:

Oh God

We praise and glorify You

For Your grace on South Sudan

Land of great abundance

Uphold us united in peace and harmony.

Oh Motherland

We rise raising flag with the guiding star

And singing songs of freedom with joy;

For justice, liberty and prosperity

Shall forever more reign!

Oh great patriots

Let us stand up in silence and respect,

[18] n.d. "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: South Sudan." Office of the Historian. Accessed August 17, 2024. https://history.state.gov/countries/south-sudan#:~:text=Search...,on%20this%20page.

Saluting our martyrs whose blood

Cemented our national foundation,

We vow to protect our nation.

Oh God, bless South Sudan!

We use to enjoy this national anthem especially the interlude, "tang tarang." It was deeply moving. Its poetic nature, rhythmic and verses speak to the years of war, quantity of blood spilled to the ground and lives lost to the flames. We thought this was the end. I believe Fr. Ukelo was joyful, for his words which echoed from the pulpit materialized. Independence brought hope which will later fade. Indeed, the path to nationhood was fraught with challenges.

The early years of independence were marred by internal conflicts and political instability. Tensions between different ethnic groups and political factions led to sporadic violence and power struggles. The outbreak of civil war in December 2013,[19] triggered by a political dispute between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar, exacerbated the situation. The conflict resulted in widespread humanitarian crises, including mass displacement and severe human rights violations.

From the bush to the bush; the South Sudanese people lost trust in anybody. It was understandable not to trust the Arabs because they were oppressive foreign agents. What about the sons of the soil, who saw fire in the bush for more than 21 years? But the people had very little to do except to run for their lives in the neighboring camps. Those who could not make it died of hunger, gunshots, slaughter etc. This is the country, the nation, the independence and autonomy we were fighting for. It just in ruins with little flame of hope lighting the path to sustainable peace and development.

[19] Nyaburi, Israel. "South Sudan conflict from 2013 to 2018." *ACCORD.* 12 19, 2018. https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/south-sudan-conflict-from-2013-to-2018/#:~:text=Skip%20to%20content,TRANSLATE%20THIS%20PAGE (accessed 8 21, 2024).

Efforts to resolve the conflict through peace agreements and negotiations have seen mixed results. The 2015 peace agreement aimed to end the violence and establish a unity government, but implementation challenges and ongoing disputes continued to hinder progress. Despite these setbacks, there have been ongoing efforts to stabilize the country and rebuild its institutions.

This agreement is formally known as the Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS).[20] It was signed on August 26, 2015, and aimed to bring an end to the civil war that had erupted in December 2013. The conflict involved various factions within South Sudan, primarily between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those aligned with former Vice President Riek Machar.

The ARCSS sought to establish a transitional government and included provisions for power-sharing among different political groups. It also outlined mechanisms for addressing issues such as security arrangements, humanitarian access, and accountability for human rights violations committed during the conflict. However, despite the signing of this peace agreement, its implementation faced significant challenges. The unity government formed under this agreement collapsed in July 2016 due to renewed fighting between rival factions, leading to further instability and violence.

The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)[21] is a significant peace agreement aimed at ending the ongoing conflict that has plagued South Sudan since its independence in 2011. The agreement was signed on September 12, 2018, and represents a renewed commitment by various factions within South Sudan to work towards peace and stability.

Key Components of the R-ARCSS

[20] IGAD South Sudan office, *Agreement on the resolution of conflict in the Republic of South Sudan*. August. 18, 2015. https://southsudan.igad.int/index.php/press/299-agreement-on-the-resolution-of-the-conflict-in-the-republic-of-south-sudan (accessed August 25, 2024).

[21] Anonymous, *Revitalized agreement on the resolution of conflict in the Republic of South Sudan*, (Addis Ababa,: IGAD, 2018), i

The R-ARCSS builds upon earlier agreements but introduces several key components designed to address the root causes of the conflict:

1. **Power Sharing**: The agreement outlines a power-sharing arrangement among various political factions, including provisions for an inclusive government that reflects the diversity of South Sudanese society. This includes positions for opposition leaders within the transitional government.

2. **Security Arrangements**: A critical aspect of the R-ARCSS is the establishment of a unified command structure for armed forces. This aims to integrate different military factions into a single national army, which is essential for maintaining peace and security.

3. **Transitional Justice**: The agreement emphasizes accountability for past atrocities through mechanisms such as truth commissions and judicial processes. This is intended to promote healing and reconciliation among communities affected by violence.

4. **Humanitarian Access**: The R-ARCSS calls for unrestricted humanitarian access to all areas affected by conflict, ensuring that aid can reach those in need without obstruction from any party involved in the conflict.

5. **Implementation Timeline**: The agreement includes specific timelines for implementing its provisions, with benchmarks set for various phases of governance restructuring, security sector reform, and humanitarian efforts.

Challenges to Implementation

Despite its comprehensive nature, several challenges hinder effective implementation:

- **Political Will**: There have been instances where parties have shown reluctance or lack of commitment to adhere strictly to the terms outlined in the agreement.

- **Security Concerns**: Sporadic violence continues in various regions despite the signing of the R-ARCSS, complicating efforts toward disarmament and integration of armed groups.

- **Humanitarian Crisis**: Ongoing food insecurity and displacement due to previous conflicts pose significant barriers to achieving stability.
- **International Support**: Continued engagement from international actors is crucial; however, fluctuating global interest can impact support levels for peacekeeping missions or humanitarian assistance.

Thus, while the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan represents a hopeful step towards peace, its success hinges on genuine cooperation among political leaders, effective implementation strategies, and sustained international support.

Current Situation and Future Prospects

South Sudan remains a nation in transition, grappling with the challenges of rebuilding and fostering national unity. The country faces significant obstacles, including economic difficulties, infrastructure deficits, and persistent ethnic tensions. The international community has played a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid and supporting peacebuilding efforts.

The plenitude of challenges South Sudan faced has made its people dependent on foreign aid. Children born in the refugee camps will know that food is distributed freely – loosing the sense of hard work and participating in the country's development. The few who become billionaires accumulate more money because they feel insecure. War may erupt anytime, this has been her story, what clouded the chronicles in her history and way of life of the South Sudanese people: From the bush to the bush.

Young people study in schools with the hope of working with Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) because of fat salary and payment using what has become "hard-currency." South Sudanese love the United States Dollars more than the South Sudanese pounds because its value has gone down. This demonstrates that they love other countries more than their own country; a loss of patriotism, civic virtues and hope for their own nation. They enjoy comfort zones in Nairobi, Kampala, Kigali, UK, US, Adis Ababa etc spending all the money they would have invested in the development of their country in other nations as waste product that is drained to the sewage. They cannot build tarmac roads in their own

country but travel abroad just to drive on a clean tarmac of Nairobi, Kampala, Kigali etc. Do South Sudanese think the developments in the neighboring east African countries came on a silver plate? Blood was lost, properties and lives were sacrificed such as the Mau Mau movement of Kenya.

The difference comes in receiving the independence. While Kenyans loved their country, developed its infrastructures and stabilized their economy, South Sudanese hated their country, destroyed the infrastructures and vandalized the economy in exchange for United States Dollars. Instead of rebuilding roads to foster investments, the money goes to the toilets within and beyond. A testimony to the power of ignorance and illiteracy in governance.

This is not the South Sudan Fr. Joseph was advocating for. His deep criticism of the post-independence government was none other than frustration. The sons of the soil finally loved money and power more than the blood and lives of the South Sudanese people. The unity in the bush during the conflicts has turned to bitter ethnic division – a survival for the fittest mechanism in which certain tribes dominate the 64 present in the country. What is more to say about South Sudan and its fate?

South Sudan's future hinges on its ability to address internal conflicts, promote inclusive governance, and foster economic development. The commitment of its leaders and the support of the international community will be vital in shaping a more stable and prosperous future for the country.

Cultural and Social Context

Throughout its history, South Sudan has been characterized by a rich cultural diversity. The country is home to numerous ethnic groups, each with its unique traditions, languages, and social practices. This cultural diversity is a source of strength but also presents challenges in terms of integration and national cohesion.

Traditional practices and customs continue to play a significant role in the lives of many South Sudanese. Efforts to preserve and celebrate cultural heritage are vital in maintaining the identity of various communities while working towards a unified national identity.

The history of South Sudan is a complex narrative of ancient civilizations, colonial legacies, and ongoing struggles for autonomy and peace. From its early days of civilization through

periods of colonial rule and the quest for independence, South Sudan's history is marked by both profound challenges and remarkable resilience. The journey of this young nation reflects the broader themes of struggle, hope, and the enduring human spirit. As South Sudan moves forward, it carries with it the lessons of its past and the hopes of its people for a more peaceful and prosperous future.

4. History of the Comboni Missionaries in South Sudan

The Comboni Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MCCJ), is a Catholic religious congregation founded by Saint Daniel Comboni in 1867.[22] Comboni, an Italian priest with a profound vision for missionary work, dedicated his life to evangelizing Africa, particularly the regions along the Nile River. His vision was shaped by a deep commitment to evangelization, social justice, and the betterment of African societies.

The love these missionaries have nurtured for Africa is truly commendable. With the hardships, rejections among other challenges – they continue to evangelize, educate and advocate for respect of human dignity. According to the Comboni Missionaries official website:

> Daniel Comboni reached South Sudan on February 14, 1858 at Holy Cross mission on the banks of the White Nile (lat. 7°). For health reasons he left it on January 15, 1859. His first contact with South Sudan was marked by sufferings and the death of his companion, Fr. Oliboni. He and his companions went back to Italy very sick. In his missionary commitment, Comboni always cherished the wish to return to the equatorial regions of Central Africa. This earnest aspiration was not to be fulfilled by him personally, but by his followers as soon as the historical circumstances made it possible.
>
> The first missionary station in South Sudan was opened by the Comboni Missionaries in Lul among the Shilluk in 1901. Kayango and Mbili, near Wau, among the Jur were opened in 1904. To these followed many more foundations of missions all over South Sudan and many missionaries worked and established Christian communities.
>
> In January 1, 1956, Sudan became independent from the British-Egyptian rule. But the civil war, called later the Anyanya One, had already begun in 1955. It was caused by unjust and unfair treatment of the Southern population by the Government of Sudan. The rapid expansion of the Church in Southern Sudan received a severe blow in 1964, when all expatriate missionaries working in the Southern regions were expelled from the area. The Anyanya war ended in 1972 with the Addis Ababa Agreement.
>
> The Institute continued to hope firmly sent back missionaries in Southern Sudan. In 1971, a Comboni community was formed in Nzara formed by Sudanese confreres. With the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement (1972), expatriate missionaries could go back to Southern Sudan but at a rather slow rhythm, due to the many difficulties in obtaining entry permits from the Khartoum Government.
>
> In 1979, there were 15 priests and seven brothers working in South Sudan and their number kept increasing year by year. In 1980, the General Council, following the advice of the Khartoum Province, divided the Sudan into two administrative missionary areas, i.e. the Khartoum Province and the South Sudan Region, at first headed by a representative of the

[22] Fr. Francesco Chemello MCCJ, *A Long Love Story; The Comboni mission in South Sudan*. (Roma.: Direzione Generale MCCJ, 2017), 26

Superior General (Fr. Raffaele Cefalo – 1 June 1981) and subsequently by a Delegate (October 15, 1982).

In 1983, the second phase of the war between North and South began with the insurrection of the Bor Garrison led by John Garang and the beginning of the activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In these years, the Delegation increased in personnel and commitments and on March 12, 1985 it was elevated to the status of a province. The elected provincial was Fr. Cesare Mazzolari who was succeeded by Fr. Abel Modi in 1990 when the former was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Rumbek.

The conflict broke the province into two: the communities in territories controlled by the government under the jurisdiction of Fr. Modi, and the communities in territories controlled by the SPLA that did not have contact with the provincial superior. For this reason in 1991 the General Administration decided to appoint Fr. Calligari coordinator of the New Sudan Group that comprised the missionaries working under SPLA held areas. The New Sudan group of Comboni Missionaries consisted of 13 confreres with four communities: Nzara, Loa, Isoke and Yirol. In 1992 SPLA tried twice to take Juba with the only result to make life more miserable for the poor citizens of Juba. For safety reasons all the expatriate missionaries were asked to leave the town. Some Sudanese confreres remained in Juba up to 1994.

By the end of May 1992, an escalation of the conflict forced all the Comboni missionaries, except for the community of Nzara, left South Sudan. These confreres met in Nairobi for an assessment. As a result, some were assigned to other provinces, and some remained to take care of the Sudanese refugees in Kakuma (Kenya) and Kocoa (Uganda). By the end of July, there were nine confreres left in the New Sudan Group. Fr. Francesco Chemello was appointed coordinator of the group and the main target was to keep the little flame alive by being close to the people in their suffering wherever was possible. Head-quarters were in Jacaranda House, Nairobi.[23]

The Comboni Missionaries began their work in Sudan in the late 19th century, during a period when European colonial powers were expanding their influence across Africa. Sudan, encompassing both the northern and southern regions that would later become Sudan and South Sudan, was a focal point for missionary activity due to its strategic location and significant cultural and religious diversity.

Early Missions in Sudan

The mission faced numerous challenges, including harsh environmental conditions, political instability, and resistance from local communities. Despite these obstacles, the Comboni

[23] Comboni Missionaries, *South Sudan* 2017. https://www.comboni.org/en/contenuti/100244#:~:text=Daniel%20Comboni%20reached,Jacaranda%20House%2C%20Nairobi. (accessed 8. 25., 2024.).

missionaries made significant strides in spreading the Catholic faith and providing social services. It should be noted that they served everyone without distinction of race, religion or ethnic backgrounds. They engaged in efforts to learn local languages and customs, which helped them build trust and integrate more effectively into the communities they served. The common cause they make with the people of Sudan and South Sudan is a testament to what St Daniel Comboni said in a homily delivered at Khartoum on May 13, 1873:

"Unfortunate Africa was the first love of my youth. I left behind everything that was dearest to me in the world, and came to these lands sixteen years ago, to offer my work for the relief of its centuries-old misfortunes. Later, obedience called me home, because of my bad health, but I left my heart among you.

> Today I return to you at last, and I regain my heart, to open it to the sublime and religious feeling of my spiritual fatherhood, with which God wished to invest me through the supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, Pope Pius IX. Yes, I am already your father and you are my children and, as such, I embrace you and press you to my heart. I am grateful for the enthusiastic welcome you have given me; it shows your love as children, and convinces me that you wish to be always my joy and my crown, as you are my portion and my inheritance. I return among you, never again to cease to be yours, and entirely consecrated to your greater good. Day and night, sun and rain will find me equally ready to help your spiritual needs: rich and poor, healthy and sick, old and young, master and servant, shall always have equal access to my heart. I shall make common cause with each one of you, and the happiest of my days will be the one on which I shall be able to give my life for you. (Writings No. 3156-3159)[24]

As their work in northern Sudan progressed, the Comboni Missionaries expanded their mission into the southern regions, which were characterized by a greater diversity of ethnic groups and a distinct cultural landscape. The southern regions, known for their rich traditions and complex social structures, presented unique opportunities and challenges for the missionaries.

The Comboni missionaries established missions in areas such as Juba, Yei, and Torit, where they focused on evangelization, education, and healthcare. They built schools, vocational training centers (such as Torit Technical) and clinics, which played a crucial role in improving the quality of life for many South Sudanese. Their efforts in education were

[24] Fr. John Tanebugo MCCJ, Traits of Missionary Spirituality https://www.comboniani.org/?page_id=3183 (accessed 20 December 2025)

particularly impactful, as they provided opportunities for young people to receive a formal education and develop skills that would benefit their communities. It is recorded that "Fr Pellegrini worked at Torit from 1926 to 1935, first as assistant priest, then as superior; he learned Lotuko perfectly and Catechumenates sprang up, and primary schools appeared, along with a technical school (Torit Technical), and workshops for mechanics, carpentry and shoe-making."[25]

Impact and Contributions

The Comboni Missionaries had a profound impact on the regions where they worked. Their contributions extended beyond religious evangelization to include social and economic development. They were instrumental in setting up healthcare facilities that addressed pressing health issues, including the treatment of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis.

Education was another significant area of focus. The missionaries established schools that provided both religious and secular education. These schools were often among the few institutions of learning available in remote areas, and they played a crucial role in promoting literacy and providing vocational training.

The Comboni Missionaries also worked to promote social justice and human rights. They were involved in advocating for the rights of marginalized communities and addressing issues related to social inequality. Their efforts in this area were aligned with the broader mission of the Comboni Order, which emphasized the importance of social and economic justice alongside religious evangelization.

Challenges and Conflict

The history of the Comboni Missionaries in Sudan and South Sudan was not without its challenges. The region experienced periods of intense conflict and instability, which affected the missionaries' work. The Sudanese Civil Wars, which began in the 1950s and continued intermittently until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, created a difficult environment for missionary activities.

[25] Comboni missionaries, *In Pace Christi: Pellegrini Agostino* https://www.comboni.org/en/fratelli/105465#:~:text=years%20at%20Torit-,Fr%20Pellegrini,-worked%20at%20Torit (accessed 20 December 2025)

During these conflicts, the Comboni missionaries often found themselves in challenging and dangerous situations. They faced threats from various factions and were sometimes caught in the crossfire of armed clashes. Despite these risks, many missionaries remained committed to their work, providing humanitarian aid and support to affected communities.

The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) was particularly challenging for the Comboni Missionaries. The conflict led to widespread displacement, suffering, and destruction. The missionaries continued to provide essential services and support to displaced populations, demonstrating their dedication and resilience in the face of adversity.

Role in Peacebuilding and Post-Independence Era

In the aftermath of South Sudan's independence in 2011, the Comboni Missionaries continued their work with a focus on peacebuilding and reconciliation. The new nation faced significant challenges, including ongoing conflict, political instability, and economic difficulties. The missionaries played a role in supporting efforts to build a peaceful and stable society.

Their work in the post-independence era included initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue and understanding among different communities. They were involved in promoting social cohesion and addressing the root causes of conflict. Their efforts to support education and healthcare continued, with an emphasis on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

Legacy and Continuing Mission

The legacy of the Comboni Missionaries in South Sudan and Sudan is one of profound impact and enduring commitment. Their work has left a lasting mark on the communities they served, with numerous schools, clinics, and religious institutions standing as a testament to their contributions.

The Comboni Missionaries' approach to mission work—characterized by a deep respect for local cultures, a commitment to social justice, and a focus on holistic development—continues to inspire and guide their activities. Their legacy is carried forward by new generations of missionaries who are dedicated to building on the foundations laid by their predecessors.

Today, the Comboni Missionaries remain active in South Sudan, continuing their mission of service and evangelization. They face ongoing challenges but remain committed to their vision of a just and compassionate world, guided by the principles of their founder, Saint Daniel Comboni.

In summary, the history of the Comboni Missionaries in Sudan and South Sudan is a story of dedication, resilience, and profound impact. Their contributions to education, healthcare, and social justice have shaped the regions where they worked, and their legacy continues to influence and inspire the mission of the Church in these areas.

5. Impacts of the Two Historical Backgrounds on Ukelo.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's life and ministry were deeply intertwined with the historical and missionary contexts of South Sudan and Sudan. His experiences and actions were profoundly shaped by the historical, social, and religious landscapes of these regions, as well as by the legacy of the Comboni Missionaries. It is important to realize that Fr. Joseph was also influenced by his cultural background.

South Sudan and Sudan's turbulent history, marked by colonial rule, civil wars, and political instability, provided a challenging backdrop for Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's ministry. The Sudanese Civil Wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005) created an environment of conflict and suffering that affected all aspects of life. Fr. Joseph's resilience was tested by the ongoing violence and instability. His ability to continue his mission amidst such adversity reflects his personal strength and unwavering commitment to his calling.

The historical context of conflict and strife influenced Fr. Joseph's approach to his mission. The need for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and social justice became central to his work. His efforts to address the needs of displaced populations and to advocate for the rights of the marginalized were direct responses to the challenges faced by the communities he served.

He saw people dying, suffering, being displaced and fleeing the country for fear. This experiences gave him the guts to speak up against the injustice and crimes against humanity committed in South Sudan. The situation in the country was not a hearsay to Ukelo; but rather he lived as an eye-witness to oppression, denigration and marginalization. How could a servant of God remain silent in the face of adversity, when the people he ministers to disappear every day, are killed, are hungry and thirsty for freedom? His conscience will not forgive him. This prompted and built courage in Fr. Joseph's mission.

The Comboni Missionaries, known for their commitment to evangelization and social justice, set a precedent that deeply influenced Fr. Joseph Ukelo. Saint Daniel Comboni's vision of "*Saving Africa with Africa*" emphasized the importance of local leadership and cultural respect. Fr. Joseph's ministry was aligned with this vision, as he worked to empower local communities and integrate Christian teachings with respect for indigenous cultures.

The Comboni Missionaries' emphasis on holistic service (combining evangelization with education, healthcare, and social justice) was evident in Fr. Joseph's work. The challenges faced by the missionaries in providing services under difficult conditions inspired him to persist and adapt his methods to better serve his community.

Like his predecessors, Fr. Joseph placed a high value on education and healthcare. The Comboni Missionaries had a significant impact on these sectors, and Fr. Joseph continued this tradition by establishing and supporting educational institutions and healthcare facilities.

His work in these areas was a continuation of the legacy of improving the quality of life for the people of South Sudan.

Fr. Joseph's commitment to speaking out against injustice and oppression was strongly influenced by the Comboni Missionaries' emphasis on social justice. His experiences with racial prejudice and political repression paralleled the struggles faced by the missionaries in advocating for the rights of the oppressed. His advocacy for the voiceless and suffering was a natural extension of the mission's core values.

The historical struggles in South Sudan (marked by oppression and marginalization) shaped Fr. Joseph's approach to ministry. His involvement in advocating for the rights of marginalized groups and speaking out against government abuses reflected a deep alignment with the mission's principles of justice and human dignity.

His efforts to build vibrant and inclusive communities were influenced by the Comboni Missionaries' model of engaging with local cultures and fostering community spirit. His approach to leadership and community engagement was rooted in the mission's practice of integrating faith with social and communal development.

The legacy of the Comboni Missionaries provided a framework for Fr. Joseph's work and his impact on the Diocese of Torit and South Sudan. His contributions to the diocese's growth, his reform efforts, and his ability to create lasting bonds with the community reflect the enduring influence of the mission's values.

The Comboni Missionaries' focus on spiritual formation and commitment to missionary work shaped Fr. Joseph's spiritual and professional development. His adherence to the motto "*Let your yes be yes and your no be no*" from Matthew 5:37 reflected the mission's emphasis on integrity and authenticity in service.

The historical challenges faced by both the Comboni Missionaries and Fr. Joseph fostered resilience and adaptability. His ability to navigate the complexities of his mission while remaining true to his values was a testament to his spiritual depth and the influence of the Comboni legacy.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's life was indeed shaped by the historical context of South Sudan and the rich legacy of the Comboni Missionaries. The tumultuous history of the region provided

a backdrop of challenge and opportunity, influencing his approach to ministry and his dedication to social justice. The Comboni Missionaries' emphasis on holistic service, community building, and advocacy for the oppressed resonated strongly with Fr. Joseph's own mission and values. His life and work represent a continuation of the vision set forth by Saint Daniel Comboni, adapted to the unique challenges and opportunities of his time. Through his resilience, dedication, and commitment to service, Fr. Joseph exemplified the enduring impact of the Comboni Missionaries and their mission to bring faith, hope, and justice to the people of South Sudan.

But how can we speak about Fr. Ukelo without knowing where he came from, the origin the shaped his childhood and the culture that nurtured him? This takes us to a brief history and civilization of the Pari people.

6. The Pari People

We are a product of nature and nurture. Our backgrounds imprints in us something that would follow us to the grave. Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, is a Pari by tribe and origin. To be able to understand him comprehensively we have to immerse ourselves in the history of his ethnic group. This is because cultures and traditions have stronger influence on the lives of people.

The Africans take seriously their cultures. Despite the influence of colonialism and religious invasion, many ethnic groups still survive up to date. The Pari tribe is one of those which kept their wealthy cultural heritage making significant impacts in the life of Fr. Ukelo and many young generations. Who are the Pari?

> The Pari live in South Sudan in an area east of the Nile River. They live around Lafon Hill, a small rocky elevation that rises abruptly out of the surrounding plain and is completely covered with terraced, Pari villages. Although they are a Nilotic group, the Pari are isolated from other Nilotes and are more closely connected with groups such as the Bari. Nilote is a term once used to refer to those people occupying the upper Nile Valley. It now also includes those peoples in surrounding areas who have the same physical, linguistic, and cultural characteristics as those living in the upper Nile Valley. The Pari have had close contact with the Dinka and Nuer groups who invaded and raided them in years past. The Pari also have been influenced by the Anuak, who occupy a large area north of them. The two groups share many cultural similarities. Some see the Pari as a branch of the Anuak and claim that the two were once one group. When the Second Sudanese Civil War began, many Pari joined the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement, and many were killed. In February 1993 all six Pari villages were burnt down. The Pari were scattered and now live in various settlements. The multi-ethnic tribe speaks Pari, a Luo language, and practice Luo customs such as an age

> set system of social organization. Jwok is the local name for God. Most of the Pari belong to the Christian religion. The pari community are basically divided into six sub-groups/villages. These include Wiatuo, Kor, Bura, Angulumere, Pugera and Puchwa. (…) Hunting of wild animals especially during the dry season is becoming a hobby to the majority of teenage boys because of need to get money after a successful hunting.[26]

The official website of "Africa Last Tribes provides a detailed summary of the Pari people. It moves from the name to customs, cultural, social and political set up. The level of accuracy of is uncertain. But so far, this is what is available. For the purpose of the objective of this work, we shall use this information to understand Fr. Ukelo within the development of his origin. This is what Africa Last Tribes have to say about the Pari people of South Sudan:

> **The Name**
> The people call themselves Pari (Paeri) or Jo-Pari (people of Pari). The Anyuak refer to them as Ojwan-Boii.
> **Demography and Geography**
> The Pari live in the former Torit District of Equatoria Province, now Lafon County. Until February 1993 they used to live at the foot of the Lipul Hill (Jebel Lafon) in 6 huge villages: Wiatuo, Bura, Puchwa, Pugeri, Kor and Angulumere.
> When all the villages were burnt down in the war, people scattered and now live in various settlements along the Hoss 'Atondi' river to the east and the Hinyetti 'Chol' river to the east. The 1982 census put the total population as some 11,000. Currently, the exact population is not known but it seems that their number has been increasing irrespective of the fact that many have died in the war.
> *Peoplegroups.org census put the total population at approximately 98,500.*
> **Environment, Economy and Natural Resources**
> Pari land is wooded savannah and annually receives some 800mm of rainfall. Many places become swampy during the rainy season. The economy is mixed between subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing.
> The Pari cultivate sorghum extensively and in usually have surplus for trade. Other major crops are cowpeas, greengrams, pumpkin, okra, sesame and tobacco. They raise a considerable number of cattle, goats and sheep. Domestic animals are essential as a medium; connecting human beings, and this world and the world of gods, and as commodities. In the dry season, they are actively engaged in hunting and fishing, which supply protein to their diet.
> Pari land used to be one of the last resorts of wild animals in Africa. A great number of elephants, buffaloes, various antelopes and gazelles inhabited there. Their populations radically decreased during the war. The two rivers, Hoss and Hinyetti, provide a good quantity of fish of various kinds. Dried and smoked fish is an important trade item. Gathering of wild edible plants is also an important means of food supply, in particular during the hunger.
> **Language**

[26] Africa 101 Last Tribes, n.d. *List Tribes.* Accessed 8 14, 2024. https://www.101lasttribes.com/tribes/pari.html#:~:text=Pari%20/%20Lafon-,Pari%20(also%20spelled%20Paeri)%20is%20an%20ethnic%20group%20in%20South%20Sudan,Peoplegroups.org,-Home.

The Pari are a Luo speaking people of the Nilotic language group. Their language (Dhi-Pari, the mouth of Pari) is very similar to Anywaa (Anyuak). The two languages are mutually intelligible. In terms of linguistic affinity, next to Anywaa, come Luo of Bahr al Ghazal, and Shilluk. However, the Acholi language, although it belongs to the Luo group and geographically closest to the Pari among other Luo groups, is a bit distant.

Mythology and History

The Pari clearly recognize their Luo origin. Oral tradition has it that all Luo used to live together at 'Wi-Pach' somewhere in eastern Bahr el Ghazal. They then dispersed because of the quarrel among the three brothers: Nyikango, Dimo and Giilo. There is another story of fight among two brothers, Uthienho and Giilo. The latter was killed by the former because of jealousy. It seems that this story refers to an event of more ancient times.

The first Luo group that settled at the Lipul Hill was led by Dimo, who became the founders of Pugeri village. They came from the area near Terekeka on the bank of White Nile, and through Lulubo-land and Lokoya-land. Then a second Luo group migrated from the north, leaving Anywaa behind. Some settled at the Hill, and others proceeded southwards. It seems that those who moved further south later formed different Luo communities in Uganda, Kenya and beyond. Those new settlers at the Lipul Hill eventually formed Bura, Puchwa, Wiatuo and Angulumere villages. The last Luo group came from the north and became the founders of Kor village.

It is remarkable that, although dhi-Pari is a Luo language and the bulk of Pari ancestors who came to settle at the Lipul were of Luo origin, the Pari are quite multi-ethnic in their origin. People acknowledge that when the first Luo group reached the Lipul, it had already been occupied by the non-Luo speaking people, and that there are a few clans of external origin (Lopit and Bor Dinka), and many individuals and families from neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Lopit, Lokoya, Lotuka and Bari came to settle and absorbed to the Pari community. This sort of inter-ethnic ties become mutually activated during the period of disasters for their own survival.

Society, Socio-Political Organisation and Traditional Authority

There are two traditional political systems among the Pari: chieftainship and mojomiji, a graded age-set system. A village is a political and territorial unit and each has its own hereditary chief (rwath). But the chief of Wiatuo, the largest village, is recognized as the chief for the entire Pari. He is the 'rain-chief' (rwadhi-koth) whose main role is to bring enough rain for the whole community. Apart from him, there is a 'bird-chief' (rwadhi-winyo) whose job is rather specific: to get rid of weaver birds that may destroy sorghum. He is from Puchwa village, but is responsible for the Pari as a whole.

Next to the rain-chief of Wiatuo, the chief of Kor village has political significance. This is because Kor, as the last settlers at the Hill, have remained as semi-independent. Both Wiatuo and Kor chiefs may work as peace-makers (likweri) to settle cases of homicide. The chief of Pugeri, who is the direct descendant of Dimo, is the priest of Lipul ('father or owner of Lipul'), the most important jwok (god, spirit or deity).

Lipul is the name of the Hill as well as the jwok. He is the one who offers to Lipul the first sorghum beer made of the first harvest, and the first wild animal hunted at the beginning of a new year. The latter ceremony is called nyalam, which annually takes place in early December when the 'star of nyalam' appears on the horizon. Men of the six villages go to the bush and hunt.

The first animal killed is brought to the top of Hill, at the entrance of a cave, where it is cooked and offered to Lipul by the chief/priest of Pugeri village. Thereafter, a dance and beer feast follows for a couple of days. It marks the beginning of a New Year and hunting season, and is the biggest festivity among the Pari. Although the Luo originally had chieftainship, and certainly the migrants to Lipul came with it, oral traditions say that the

rain-chieftainship was borrowed from the neighbours: Lopit, Lotuka, Lokoya, and Bari who have rain-chiefs.

The mojomiji system is another example of cultural contacts. It is a graded age-set system, in which age-sets go up the ladder from the grade of youth (awope), then to the grade of fully grown up men (mojomiji), and finally to the grade of elders (chidonge). Although women do have their own age-sets, the mojomiji is predominantly a paternistic system. All men of the mojimiji grade, or the 'ruling generation', constitute a sort of collective government, and are bestowed with legislative and judiciary powers.

They are also responsible for defence. They own the village drums kept in the big drum house. It is located at the centre of the village facing the dancing ground. The fenced compound where the drum house is located is the place where mojomiji and elders sit together and discuss village affairs. The term mojomiji was borrowed from Lopit-Lotuho-Lokoya (monyomiji, 'fathers of the village'), the Pari adopted the system as a result of cultural contact with other ethnic groups.

About every 10 years a new mojomiji takes over power and the old one retires to the elders' grade. The last one took place in 1999. Displaced Pari communities in Khartoum, Juba can be found in internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugeescamps. They also held a ceremony for the new mojomiji to show solidarity with those at their ancestral home as this is the biggest ceremonial occasion among the Pari.

The two political systems coexist and cooperate, but sometimes conflict arises. This is particularly witnessed when the rain-chief cannot make enough rain or stop too much rain. Then the mojimiji may threaten and even punish the rain chief.

Spirituality, Belief and Customs

The Pari believe in jwok (pl. juu). There are many places of jwok, including Lipul, where offerings and sacrifices are made. They also say that Jwok is like the wind and is therefore, everywhere. This is both good and bad for human beings. There are traditional healers-diviners or witch doctors. They are both men and women and called ajwa (pl. ajuu). A dying person makes either a blessing (gweth) or curse (cien). The power of a curse is very much feared, as it may bring disasters not only to individuals but to the entire community.

Neighbours and Foreign Relations

The Pari were put under government administration in the 1910s. Before that, they were attacked by the Mahdist in 1898, but successfully repulsed them. In 1912 the government army attacked them killing many people and confiscating a lot of cattle. A Catholic church and a primary school were established in the late 1930s. But until 1972 the Pari had produced rather a small number of educated people compared to other ethnic groups in the region. This is partly because the villages were not destroyed during the first civil war and only a few sought refuge in Uganda.

Latest Developments

When the last war started, the Pari became the first people in Equatoria to join the SPLM/SPLA en masse. Pari SPLA men made a large contribution liberation struggle resulting in a significant loss of Pari. As Pari land and the Lipul Hill (Jebel Lafon) occupies a strategic location connecting Eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile-Gambella, and connecting Pibor, Bor, Kapoeta, Torit, Mongalla and Juba towns, it became the battle ground at various times between the government army and the SPLA, and between factions of the SPLA.

Now, the original 6 villages at the foot of the Hill no longer exist and the entire population has dispersed apart from those who remained in scattered settlements; with others staying in Khartoum, Juba, in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) inside Equatoria, in refugee settlements in Uganda and Kakuma, Kenya. Moreover, some have settled in East Africa, Egypt, Europe and North America. They are also divided between Old Sudan and New Sudan.

> Faced with this new situation, efforts have been made at networking and reconnecting with themselves. Recent remarkable examples were two peace and reconciliation workshops. The first one was held in Juba organized by Pari leaders living there and the second one was held in Pari land, facilitated by Pari living in Kenya and Uganda.
> Another notable development was the creation of a new county that finally granted the Pari and Lopit separation from Torit County. This granted the wish of the people who hope that it will provide them better opportunities for reconstruction and development. The displacement in the war had a positive aspect; as it provided an opportunity for many young Pari men obtain and attain high level of education in North Sudan, East Africa and beyond.[27]

One can easily see the rich cultural heritage which Ukelo inherited. This is but an excerpt of the history from one source. However, there could be other sources that explain the cultural background and practices of the Pari people into details. I have known a few people from Pari and they always surprised me with their style of life.

They are so friendly, welcoming, open to relationship but principled. Most of them live by principles which shapes their entire live and interaction with people. Fr. Joseph appears to be one of those who, even in the midst of cultural turbulence and influence, was able to hold on to his principles while living humanly.

This history will paint an image of a Fr. Joseph who was born into a family, a tribe and human community. He once told me that he underwent the initiation ceremony. It reinforces authority, strength, and the care for the society. One has to prove he is an adult male through this tough ceremonial action. Ukelo was not an exemption. What impact did this history left on Ukelo?

Influence of His Ethnic Origin

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, a Pari Comboni Missionary, grew up in a community deeply shaped by the history and cultural dynamics of the Pari people. The historical context of the Pari, particularly their experiences with conflict, displacement, and the ongoing struggle for identity and survival, likely had a profound impact on his life and mission.

The Pari people, as detailed in their history, faced significant displacement during the Second Sudanese Civil War, with their villages being destroyed and their population

[27] Africa 101 Last Tribes, n.d. *List Tribes.* Accessed 8 14, 2024. https://www.101lasttribes.com/tribes/pari.html#:~:text=Pari%20/%20Lafon-,Pari%20(also%20spelled%20Paeri)%20is%20an%20ethnic%20group%20in%20South%20Sudan,Peoplegroups.org,-Home.

scattered. Growing up in such a tumultuous environment, Fr. Joseph would have been acutely aware of the suffering and instability that war brings. This personal and communal experience likely fueled his passion for being a "*voice of the voiceless*," advocating for peace, justice, and the rights of the marginalized.

Their strong spiritual beliefs and cultural practices, including their devotion to Jwok and their age-regiment system (mojomiji), would have influenced Fr. Joseph's understanding of faith and community. These aspects of Pari life emphasize the importance of spiritual leadership, communal responsibility, and the integration of religious and cultural identity. As a Comboni Missionary, Fr. Joseph likely drew on these cultural strengths, using them to build bridges between the Christian faith and traditional Pari beliefs, while also fostering a sense of resilience and hope among his people.

The dual political systems among the Pari (chieftainship and the *mojomiji*) highlight the importance of leadership in maintaining social order and guiding the community through difficult times. Fr. Joseph's role as a missionary and community leader could have been inspired by these traditional structures, where he saw the need for a moral and spiritual guide, much like the chiefs and elders in Pari society. His leadership during political difficulties in South Sudan likely mirrored the roles of these traditional leaders, combining spiritual guidance with active participation in social and political matters.

The displacement of the Pari during the war, while tragic, also opened up new opportunities for education and exposure to broader perspectives, as many young Pari men, including Fr. Joseph, were able to attain higher education. This education equipped Fr. Joseph with the tools needed to advocate effectively for his people, not only within the church but also in the broader socio-political context of South Sudan. His advocacy during political difficulties was likely informed by both his traditional upbringing and his formal education, allowing him to bridge the gap between his people's needs and the national and international platforms.

Given the deep spiritual roots of the Pari and their experiences with trauma and loss, Fr. Joseph's role as a Comboni Missionary would have been crucial in promoting healing and reconciliation. The Pari people's belief in Jwok, combined with their experiences of suffering, would have informed Fr. Joseph's pastoral approach, focusing on the healing

power of faith and the importance of unity and forgiveness in the face of division and conflict.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's life and mission were undoubtedly shaped by the rich and complex history of the Pari people. His work as a "*voice of the voiceless"* and his instrumental role during times of political difficulty in South Sudan can be seen as a direct response to the challenges and values of his community. His leadership, advocacy, and spiritual guidance were deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, and spiritual experiences of the Pari, making him a pivotal figure in both the religious and socio-political spheres of his time.

7. Yes, Yes! No, No!

Before the celebration of his golden Jubilee, the team organizing had some interview with Fr. Joseph. Particularly the then Bishop Elect. Rt. Rev. Alex Lodiong Sakor spearheaded this. Fr. Ukelo reflected on his 50 years of priesthood:

> "The 50 years I spent as a priest were joyous; although with a lot of challenges, a lot of suffering even imprisoned for telling the truth. My motto is *'Yes, Yes! No, No! More than that comes from the evil one.'* Mt 5:37. Only truth will win. I live by it, guided by it and all my life as a priest; it is my guardian, the word of God. To defend the rights of the voiceless, the rights of the suffering, the rights of the people of the south. And I feel really proud because I am fulfilled and I am happy being a priest, a missionary, comboni missionary; I will continue serving the Lord and the people with great joy." [28]

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's reflection on his fifty years as a priest summarizes the essence of a life dedicated to service, truth, and unwavering commitment to justice. His testimony provides a profound insight into the realities of a missionary's journey, marked by both immense joy and significant trials. His motto, "Yes, Yes! No, No! More than that comes from the evil one," drawn from Matthew 5:37, highlights his dedication to integrity and honesty. This principle has been a cornerstone of his ministry, guiding him through the complex and often perilous landscape of missionary work. In a world where truth can sometimes be compromised, Fr. Yala's adherence to this motto signifies a deep and abiding commitment to the ethical and spiritual dimensions of his vocation.

[28] *We met with Fr. Joseph Ukelo to share a little insight about himself*. Directed by Bishop Elect. Rt. Rev. Alex Lodiong Sakor. Performed by Fr. Joseph Ukello Yala. 2022.

The mention of “a lot of challenges” and “a lot of suffering,” including imprisonment for standing by the truth, reveals the sacrifices that Fr. Ukelo has made in his pursuit of justice. His willingness to endure hardship for the sake of defending the rights of the voiceless and suffering give emphasis to a profound courage and selflessness. These experiences are a testament to his resilience and dedication, showing that his mission went beyond mere words to a lived reality of sacrifice and advocacy.

Fr. Ukelo’s pride in his role as a Comboni missionary and his ongoing joy in serving the Lord and his community reflect a life of purpose and fulfillment. His work, particularly in advocating for the rights of marginalized populations in the global south, resonates deeply with the core values of the Comboni Missionaries, who are known for their commitment to justice and the service of the poor.

In reflecting on Ukelo’s testimony, one is reminded of the powerful impact that a life lived in truth and service can have. His journey exemplifies the challenges and triumphs of a missionary's life, revealing a path marked by profound faith, steadfastness in the face of adversity, and a deep-seated joy in serving others. His golden jubilee is not only a celebration of his half-century of priesthood but also a tribute to the enduring power of living a life aligned with one’s values and mission.

What can be thought of Fr. Ukelo? Imagine the humility, the service, the threats, the imprisonment etc. What was moving, protecting and guiding Fr. Ukelo in the face of a hostile atmosphere?

Fr. Ukelo’s commitment to the motto “Yes, Yes! No, No!” shows the importance of clarity and conviction in a missionary’s vision. His unwavering adherence to truth and honesty reveals how a clear ethical compass can guide one through even the most challenging circumstances. This vision is not merely theoretical but is lived out through actions and choices that reflect deep moral and spiritual principles.

The fact that Fr. Ukelo endured imprisonment for his commitment to telling the truth speaks volumes about the nature of his mission. It suggests that his work often put him at odds with powerful forces resistant to change or justice. His ability to maintain his integrity in such

adversities reveals a profound strength of character and a deep-seated commitment to his values, even at personal cost.

Fr. Ukelo's focus on defending the rights of the voiceless and suffering emphasizes the role of missionaries in social justice. His service to the people of the south (a region often characterized by poverty and marginalization) reflects a broader call to action for addressing systemic inequalities. This aspect of his ministry illustrates how religious commitment can intersect with social advocacy, challenging injustices and working towards meaningful change.

Despite the trials he faced, Fr. Yala's expression of joy and fulfillment in his priestly vocation is noteworthy. This joy is not just a personal sentiment but an affirmation of the intrinsic rewards that come from living out one's faith through service. It highlights that true fulfillment often comes from contributing to the well-being of others and being part of a larger mission that transcends personal comfort.

Fifty years of service provide a great example of what it means to live a life of faith and courage. His experiences serve as a model for both current and future missionaries, demonstrating how one can navigate the complexities of ministry with unwavering dedication and moral fortitude. His legacy is a beacon of hope and inspiration for those committed to serving others with integrity and compassion.

His emphasis on living by the word of God and using it as his guiding principle points to the vital role of spiritual guidance in missionary work. This underscores the importance of grounding one's actions in spiritual and scriptural teachings, providing a source of strength and direction amidst the challenges faced.

Fr. Yala's testimony is not only a personal reflection but also a broader commentary on the transformative power of faith, the challenges inherent in living out one's principles, and the enduring impact of a life dedicated to justice and service. His golden jubilee serves as a celebration of a life well-lived and a powerful testament to the virtues of courage, integrity, and joy in the service of others.

8. Missing but Alive; Listen to his testimony

Although Fr. Ukelo has left this world, he is alive in the hearts of many, in the world of knowledge and biographies. This reflection keeps his memory, style and speech as a testament to his last days. For the purpose of listening to him, the transcription of the video interview is left without much changes. Feel, hear and touch the spirit of Fr. Ukelo in this words as he passionately speaks about many things in his life:

> "Yes, I have been Working in formation for 13 years. In minor seminary of Torit, in Tombura, Yambio as a spiritual director of missionary sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I have been in South Africa for 10 years really experience of Christian life. In my life as a missionary that if you have one challenge. Here in the South Sudan because of war So there were challenges of war. For people being killed. People being mistreated. People die. People die of hunger, people died because of lack of leadership or bad leadership. And these really make me sad. My motto: 'Let your words always be Yes, Yes, No, No more than that Comes from the evil one'. And now I am trying to live this motto in my concrete life and suffer much more for the truth.
>
> I stayed in South Africa for 10 years; Serving the people of God with the spirit of truth, and there was still apartheid; that black are not seen as people. The white pray alone and the blacks alone. I told them this is not the right way of praying! whom are you pray to? The other ones they came together to pray God. And I thank them for this courage to accept our mistakes, our challenges. This was really a challenge but I tried. And I built a church which is very beautiful. I said should be dedicated to Comboni. They said 'NO' it must be dedicated to St Joseph in order to remember you. And bishop agreed and so on. We make a beautiful community.
>
> My life is first of all to live humanly. If I don't work, stay with people humanly, respecting them, accepting them to the church to be active members of the church; giving them responsibility like Finance and all other jobs, I give to them. And I am to give the sacraments. And this, we build ourselves especially in South Africa I did like that. Many other parishes wherever I stay, when I live the place people weep. Not because I am the holiest, the good one; no. It is because of being human. Treating people with humanity. And then Christianity enters into it in order to perfect it. This is what I did. In spite of all the crosses, but I am as being in 51 years as a priest; a very very happy missionary. In my old age now 84, I am still happy; I am still young in spirit. In spite of my old age, I still continue to serve the Lord in the spirit of our founder Comboni, 'save Africa with Africa' is his motto. We have to try to educate ourselves for the good of our people.
>
> All the wars which took place, I was always there. To speak in the name of people. To speak for the justice. To speak against oppression, against both governments of the north and government of the south; they had a lot of mistakes, a lot of atrocities. Even today it is still going on in my mission. People are still dying. Today while I am speaking, people are being exploited, people are not served. This one makes me sad, makes me to speak out what is the truth.

> As my conclusion, I thank all of you who are listening. And all of us try our best to be missionary of action, missionary of action. Thank you"[29]

These experiences provide a touching and multi-dimensional view of his life as a missionary priest. His statements reveal a deep understanding of the essence of true ministry, rooted in humanity and justice. Emphasis on living "humanly" shows the importance of authentic relationships and respect in ministry. He teaches that an effective pastoral care goes beyond the mere administration of sacraments; it involves engaging with people on a human level. His approach of integrating respect and responsibility into church life, such as involving laypeople in roles like finance, reflects a model of leadership that values and empowers the community. This human-centered approach not only fosters a strong sense of belonging but also embodies the Christian principle of treating others with dignity and love.

The decision to dedicate the church to St. Joseph instead of Comboni, as per the community's preference, demonstrates Fr. Ukelo's willingness to prioritize the community's wishes and needs over his personal preferences. This act of inclusivity and adaptability contributed to building a strong, cohesive community. His ability to blend his mission with local customs and desires illustrates a profound respect for the local culture and a commitment to creating a church environment that feels genuinely welcoming and relevant to its members.

Fr. Ukelo's experience of people weeping upon his departure is telling of the profound impact he had on the communities he served. This emotional response is not necessarily a reflection of his personal sanctity but rather of his genuine humanity and the relational bonds he built with people. It highlights how meaningful and lasting connections are formed through empathy, respect, and consistent care, rather than through grand gestures or titles. His legacy in these communities is a testament to the power of personal engagement and the deep-seated influence of treating people with kindness and respect.

Fr. Ukelo's dedication to speaking out against injustice, whether from governments or other sources of oppression, reflects his deep commitment to social justice. His involvement in addressing both local and global injustices demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of his mission, extending beyond spiritual guidance to active engagement in advocating for the

[29] *Late Padre Joseph Ukelo Yala a South Sudanese Comboni Missionary speaks about Priesthood & Service*. Published by Komakech Kenyi 91. Performed by Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala. (Jan 16, 2024.)

rights and dignity of individuals. His ongoing sadness about the suffering and exploitation still occurring in his mission underlines his deep empathy and unwavering commitment to justice, even in the face of ongoing challenges.

At 84, Fr. Ukelo's statement about remaining "young in spirit" and his continued dedication to serving others despite his advanced age highpoint a remarkable vitality and passion. His adherence to the Comboni motto, "Save Africa with Africa," illustrates his lifelong commitment to empowering local people and fostering self-reliance. His enduring spirit serves as a powerful example of how age and physical limitations do not necessarily diminish one's ability to contribute meaningfully to a mission; rather, they can enhance one's wisdom and resolve.

The call for missionaries to be "missionaries of action" compresses his belief in the importance of active, engaged service. This exhortation emphasizes that effective mission work involves not just preaching and teaching but also actively addressing the needs of the community and advocating for change. His call serves as a reminder that true mission work is dynamic and responsive, requiring ongoing effort and a commitment to living out one's values in concrete ways.

This reveal a life of profound dedication to human dignity, community-building, justice, and active service. His experiences and insights offer a rich and inspiring model for how a missionary's work can blend spiritual leadership with genuine human connection and advocacy, leaving a lasting and meaningful impact on the communities they serve.

9. A Very Happy Missionary

In his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* Late Pope Francis wrote:

> An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the 'smell of the sheep' and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. (EG, 24)[30]

[30] Pope Francis I, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican Press, 2013), 24

Ukelo exemplifies the Holy Father's remarks throughout his missionary life. Though he had his own weaknesses, Ukelo was a man of action, forgiveness and joy. The affirmation that he remains "a very very happy missionary" despite the challenges he has faced, and his ongoing commitment to serving in the spirit of Comboni's motto "Save Africa with Africa," deeply illustrate his dedication to his priestly vocation and evangelization.

A joyful and happy missionary attracts young people to missionary life. However, if we have missionaries who are in crisis, sad and desperate. What joy will they transmit to the people they evangelize. The joy inside Ukelo radiated to those around him with a gamma penetration.

Fr. Ukelo reminds us to evangelize with joy. To forgive with joy. To play with joy. And to always respect the dignity of every image of God. In the face of suffering, we have to remain resilient but never silent against oppression. We have to speak up against things that bring misery to our society and embody a community spirit of listening and correcting ourselves. What does this statement make of Fr. Ukelo?

His happiness amid adversity indicates that his sense of purpose and commitment to his mission provides him with profound fulfillment. This joy is likely tied to the intrinsic rewards of living out his calling, making a difference in people's lives, and adhering to his values despite obstacles.

Perseverance in challenges without losing joy suggests a robust emotional and spiritual strength. This ability to maintain happiness in the face of difficulties speaks to a strong inner conviction and faith that sustains him through trials. Meanwhile his joy reflects a continuous motivation to serve others; It shows that his commitment is not dependent on favorable conditions but is a steadfast response to his vocation, driven by a deep-seated belief in the value and impact of his work.

Ukelo's commitment to the Comboni motto, "Save Africa with Africa," and his focus on educating and empowering local people call attention to commitment to his priestly vocation. The motto emphasizes a vision of self-reliance and local empowerment. Fr. Ukelo's commitment to this principle reflects his dedication to fostering sustainable development within the communities he serves. By focusing on educating and empowering

local people, he aligns with the idea that lasting change comes from within the community itself, with external support playing a facilitative role.

The motto also suggests an approach that respects and utilizes local knowledge and resources. Fr. Ukelo's work demonstrates a commitment to understanding and integrating local contexts, rather than imposing external solutions. This cultural sensitivity is crucial in effective missionary work, ensuring that efforts are relevant and respectful of local traditions and needs.

Comboni's motto involves a long-term vision of development and transformation. Fr. Ukelo's ongoing service, even into his old age, embodies a long-term commitment to his mission. At his old age, Ukelo never thought of retiring from service. He serves even with a walking stick. Even though his old age could not facilitate active service, he did what he could with all efforts. He kept doing what he could for the Lord and his people. His focus on education and self-improvement reflects a belief in the gradual but profound impact of consistent, patient work over time.

Fr. Yala's emphasis on education and self-improvement for the good of the people aligns with the broader mission of spiritual and personal growth. By fostering education and local leadership, he not only contributes to immediate needs but also invests in the long-term development and empowerment of the community.

Ukelo shows that our faith must be lived in service to humanity. A faith that is self-centered and vertically dominant in its relationship drains the message of the Gospel. We must live our faith in acting for the good of our brothers and sisters. This completes the vertical and horizontal dimensions of liturgy which must be applied to our faith.

Therefore, Fr. Ukelo's joy and commitment illustrate a profound dedication to his priestly vocation. His ability to remain happy despite challenges and his adherence to the principle of "Save Africa with Africa" reflect a deep, resilient faith and a genuine commitment to empowering and uplifting the communities he served. His life and work exemplify how a priestly vocation can be a source of deep personal fulfillment and a powerful force for positive change.

10. Making a Beautiful Community

As Africans, the community is where we find our essence. The Kenyan Philosopher John S. Mbiti wrote, "I am because we are, and since we are, I am,"[31] meanwhile Ubuntu Philosophy rest on the statement: "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" which means "a person is a person through other people." I realize my existence in the face of the other person. This defines our life, heritage, and our philosophy. Hence, Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's statement, "We make a beautiful community," conveys several important aspects of his character and his approach to his ministry.

He believes in the importance of collaborative efforts in building a strong and supportive community. This shows his view that community development is a collective endeavor, involving the active participation of its members. His use of "*we*" indicates that he sees himself as part of a larger team working towards a common goal, rather than being the sole architect of the community.

Fr. Ukelo's approach reflects a commitment to inclusivity. By focusing on creating a "beautiful community," he emphasizes that every individual's contribution and involvement are valued. His efforts to integrate people into various roles and responsibilities within the church show his belief in fostering an environment where everyone has a stake in the community's well-being.

His statement reflects a holistic vision of ministry that goes beyond spiritual guidance to encompass social and relational aspects. Building a "beautiful community" involves nurturing positive relationships, fostering mutual respect, and creating an environment where people feel valued and connected. This holistic approach aligns with his broader mission of integrating faith with practical, everyday concerns.

The idea of a "beautiful community" speaks to the importance Fr. Ukelo places on human connection and the quality of relationships within the community. It suggests that he values not only the physical or institutional aspects of community life but also the emotional and spiritual bonds that make a community vibrant and supportive.

[31] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 108.

Fr. Ukelo acknowledges the positive and lasting impact of his ministry. This reflects a legacy of creating environments where people thrive, feel supported, and are encouraged to contribute meaningfully. The beauty of the community he refers to is likely a testament to the enduring positive effects of his work and leadership.

His ability to articulate the creation of a "beautiful community" indicates a sense of personal fulfillment and accomplishment. It shows that his efforts have not only been about meeting immediate needs but also about cultivating an environment where people experience genuine connection and growth.

This aligns with the values expressed in Comboni's motto, "Save Africa with Africa." It reflects Fr. Ukelo's vision of empowering local communities to develop and flourish through mutual support, respect, and active engagement. His work in fostering such communities demonstrates his alignment with the principles of self-reliance and local empowerment.

Ukelo's emphasis on community building stresses the broader impact of missionary work. It shows how missionary efforts can contribute to the development of strong, cohesive communities where people live out their faith in practical, meaningful ways.

It can therefore mean that, Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's statement, "We make a beautiful community," reveals his deep commitment to collaborative, inclusive, and holistic community building. It reflects his belief in the power of strong human connections, the lasting positive impact of his ministry, and the alignment of his work with the values of empowerment and mutual support. This phrase condenses the essence of his approach to ministry and the meaningful, transformative outcomes of his work.

11.Lover of People

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's description as the "Lover of the People" in Guido Oliana's book "Lover of the People" aligns profoundly with the testimonials and reflections he has shared about his life and work. The title speaks for itself. Ukelo was a kind of missionary who felt in love with his God, people and vocation. This love was manifest in his missionary efforts and substantiated in the fruits which stand today as testimonies to his work. According to Fr. Guido Oliana's account of Fr. Joseph Ukelo,

> This biography is a sort of memorial of God's graceful action in the life of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, a South Sudanese Comboni Missionary. He has been courageously faithful to this religious missionary vocation through the thick and thin of his adventurous life in the Sudan, South Sudan, Italy, and South Africa. With his witness, Fr. Joseph can thus become a model for other South Sudanese and non-South Sudanese youth.[32]

Fr. Guido further remarks on his motto. According to him (Oliana), it "represents the synthetic principle of all his human, spiritual, and ministerial qualities as a priest and as a Comboni Missionary."[33] Oliana summarized Fr. Ukelo's profile in seven important words which he says has never been written for a canonization process: *frankness, compassion, dedication, love for South Sudan, love for Jesus Christ, for the Church, and for St. Daniel Comboni.*[34]

However, it should be noted that Joseph was not exempted from error. According to Oliana, "Fr. Ukelo has his limitations, he committed and still commits his errors; his frankness may at times lead him to become unilateral in his judgments and perhaps create tension with some people (…)"[35] However, Ukelo had a deep spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness. Oliana recounts that "he is able to make for his limitations in humbly accepting corrections, in reviewing his judgments and in being ready to reconcile, forgive and forget when conflict arise."[36] This is the kind of life that Fr. Joseph lived. He was not an angel sent from above. He was not a perfect missionary priest; but one who was always ready to be corrected, to forgive and reconcile.

If there is anything that can shape the human society, it is forgiveness and reconciliation. Despite our efforts to always be perfect, strive to do good and harmonize our relationships with other people, weaknesses are lurking. We find ourselves doing the evil we hate, and not doing the good we love as St Paul wrote (Cf Romans 7:15). However, we should overcome them through forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the value Ukelo lived throughout his

[32] Fr. Guido Oliana, MCCJ. *The Lover of People*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, n.d.), 94
[33] Oliana, MCCJ. *The Lover of People*, 96.
[34] Oliana, MCCJ. *The Lover of People*, 95.
[35] Oliana, MCCJ. *The Lover of People*, 95.
[36] Oliana, MCCJ. *The Lover of People*, 95.

life. He stands as a testament to how forgiveness and reconciliation can forge a new path for relations, give us a fresh breath and a life to live in hope.

Fr. Yala's emphasis on treating people "humanly" and his ability to build "a beautiful community" reflect his deep empathy and compassion. His approach to ministry is not just about religious duties but about connecting with people on a personal level, valuing their dignity, and fostering a sense of belonging. His commitment to integrating people into church roles and respecting their contributions speaks to his genuine care for their well-being and growth.

Several individuals have testified that Ukelo once forced a plane bring spoiled food to return back. It was a time of terrible hunger in Juba and the Khartoum government brought some food which was not save for human consumption. On hearing the plane landing and aware of it, Fr. Ukelo went straight to the Juba airport. Above all odds, surprising everyone; he shouted to the officials there asking them to return the *Tisali* (not sure about the name) and bring genuine food for human consumption. This was a rare kind of courage which he demonstrated because he loved the people. The government acted that way because they did not have genuine love for the people they served. But Ukelo was unstoppable. The plane had to go back to Khartoum there and then – something incredible.

His joy in service and the emotional responses from the communities he served indicate how deeply he has touched people's lives. Being described as a "Lover of People" resonates with this aspect of his character, as his ministry is characterized by a profound respect for individuals and a dedication to their holistic development.

Fr. Ukelo's focus on involving community members in various responsibilities within the church reflects his belief in empowering others. By giving people roles like finance and other positions, he shows respect for their abilities and encourages their active participation in church life. This approach not only builds a sense of ownership but also aligns with a love that values and uplifts others.

In fact, being described as a "Lover of People" is validated by his practical efforts to include and empower individuals. His work reflects a commitment to enhancing the community's capabilities and well-being, demonstrating a love that is active and transformative.

Fr. Ukelo's statement about remaining a "very happy missionary" despite the challenges underscores his resilience and enduring joy in his vocation. His happiness is rooted in the fulfillment he derives from his work, which involves both the spiritual and relational dimensions of his mission. This joy in the face of adversity and his continuous service reflect a deep, genuine love for the people he serves. His ability to find happiness in serving others, even amidst difficulties, highlights the sincerity and depth of his commitment, consistent with being a "Lover of People."

His dedication to speaking out against injustice and addressing both local and global issues reflects his broader commitment to social justice. His advocacy for the rights of the marginalized and his efforts to address systemic problems align with a vision of love that includes a commitment to justice and the common good.

His active stance on issues of justice and his dedication to advocating for those who suffer underscores a love that is both compassionate and courageous. This advocacy, coupled with his human connection, reinforces the image of him as a "Lover of People" who actively works to improve their conditions and fight for their rights.

Thus, Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's testimonials and reflections substantiate the description of him as a "Lover of People" by illustrating his deep empathy, commitment to empowerment, joy in service, advocacy for justice, alignment with Comboni's mission, and lasting personal connections. His life and work embody the principles of love, respect, and active engagement with the community, validating the affectionate and respectful portrayal found in Guido Oliana's book.

12. Treat People Humanly

Ukelo lived in times when colonialism and oppression was at its peak in Sudan and Southern Sudan. His personal experience speaks of inhumane treatment of people and so he rose to counter such injustice. His emphasis on "treating people with humanity" as a core aspect of his ministry is extremely noteworthy in the context of today's global and local challenges. This approach not only indicates his personal commitment to empathy and respect but also

offers valuable insights into how such values can address and alleviate contemporary political, social, economic, and religious issues.

Political Significance

Many regions around the world are experiencing heightened political polarization and conflict. Leaders and governments often struggle with issues of legitimacy, corruption, and divisiveness. Treating people with humanity in such contexts involves addressing the needs and grievances of all segments of society, promoting dialogue, and fostering inclusive governance. South Sudan is not excluded from this polarization and conflict.

There is a growing distrust in political institutions and leaders globally. Emphasizing humanity in politics could restore faith in these institutions by ensuring that they are more responsive and accountable to the needs of their constituents. Political leaders should always remind their greedy ego that they are serving human beings. Creatures who are endowed with dignity. Actions should be directed toward enhancing the human family other than destroying it.

South Sudan has faced political instability and conflict since her independence. The emphasis on treating people with humanity is crucial in such settings to bridge divides and rebuild trust. Efforts to address the underlying causes of conflict, promote reconciliation, and ensure that all voices are heard are vital for peace and stability. Human-centered approaches in governance could help address issues of corruption and ineffective administration, fostering more equitable and just political processes.

Social Issues

Social inequality, including issues related to race, gender, and class, remains pervasive. A focus on humanity involves recognizing and addressing these inequalities, promoting social justice, and ensuring that marginalized communities are uplifted and empowered. Today, gender equality is far from attaining its goals. Women continue to suffer violence, rejection, humiliation and abuse. Given the technological advancement, this abuse has taken a different form. The world rejoices to watch women strip naked on the media. For this is what they consume. Yet, the ones carrying the shame, weight of exclusion and stigma bear the heaviest

cost. Is it advancement or invention of new ways of abuse? Yet, Fr. Ukelo reminds us to treat people with dignity.

Many societies are experiencing fragmentation and loss of social cohesion. Treating people with humanity can help rebuild social ties by fostering understanding, compassion, and cooperation among diverse groups. In South Sudan, social divisions exacerbated by conflict and ethnic tensions require a focus on humanity to heal wounds and build unity. Efforts to promote inclusivity and respect for all ethnic and social groups are crucial in fostering national cohesion. In the context of ongoing displacement and humanitarian crises, treating people with humanity translates into providing support and aid that is respectful and responsive to the needs of displaced populations.

Economic Challenges

The global economy is marked by significant disparities between rich and poor nations, and within nations themselves. Treating people with humanity involves advocating for fair economic practices, addressing poverty, and creating opportunities for economic advancement that are equitable and just. Economic systems that prioritize profit over people can lead to exploitation and marginalization. Emphasizing humanity in economic policies involves creating systems that prioritize well-being and fair treatment for all. South Sudan faces severe economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. A humane approach to economic development involves creating opportunities for sustainable growth, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and supporting local communities in building their own economic resilience.

Economic challenges are intertwined with humanitarian needs. Providing aid and support in a way that respects the dignity and humanity of individuals is essential for effective and compassionate relief efforts. However, humanitarian assistance should always aim at helping people to become self-reliant. The presence of many agencies in South Sudan threatens the economic independence of the people. They are dependent on foreign aid without creating an indigenous base for self-reliance. How long can South Sudanese stay in the refugee camps? Some have already become citizens of the camp while others only hear about their country in the news.

If treating people humanly must be acted upon, the government of South Sudan should work for an independent people. A neighbor who depends on others cannot nurture his children well. They will grow knowing they depend on others. Genuine leadership must look to the good of every citizen and every human person in the nation.

Religious and Cultural Contexts

Around the world, religious tensions and conflicts can undermine social cohesion. Treating people with humanity involves promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and respect for religious diversity. In a globalized world, cultural sensitivity and respect are essential for harmonious coexistence. Emphasizing humanity involves recognizing and valuing cultural differences and working towards mutual understanding.

Yet, today – thousands of Christians are being killed globally. In Africa, Nigeria stands as one of the countries which has become unsafe for religious freedom especially for Christians. People no longer see humanity in others. They see votes, souls, converts and numbers to fill their places of worship.

South Sudan is home to diverse religious beliefs and practices. Treating people with humanity involves fostering an environment where religious freedom is respected, and interfaith dialogue is encouraged to build mutual respect and cooperation. No religion is superior to the others. Every religion and denomination should exercise restraint and tolerance in their practice of faith. No manipulation and defamation of other religions and denominations. Why are we fighting a senseless conflict? Does God belong to your religion alone? Why do we privatize God and closed Him inside a box? Is he not the God of all and loves all?

As human beings, we are exercising worship of the divine through diverse means. Forcing or enticing people to join a sect, cult, religion or denomination is a violation of the freedom of religion. Moreover, it is against Ukelo's principle, "treat people humanly" because they are not objects of manipulation. Every person is a reality searching for meaning in science, philosophy, religion, tradition, culture etc. So, do not stop someone from this vital adventure.

The emphasis on humanity can also support efforts to heal cultural rifts and address historical grievances, helping to build a more cohesive and resilient society. No culture is superior than

another. Every human person finds himself or herself in a culture which built him and nurture his world view. The difference in our cultures should reflect richness not incubate hatred and superiority complex. It should arouse in us a sense of belonging, pleasure and appreciation of the wealthy African heritage we share. Yet, many do this the contrary. They seek to extinct other cultures so that they dominate. What will you do after dominating? Thus, every culture is valid and good in itself irrespective of perceptions. Everyone has the obligation to respect cultures.

Fr. Ukelo found himself in a culture of the Pari people. He did not end there. He went on to advocate for the respect of the human dignity in societies where he was the only Pari. He ministered to people who were not his tribemates. But he did so with love, zeal and dedication – knowing that human life is sacred and should be preserved from sacrilege. He was aware that left to warlords and power mongers, the human person and his culture can be manipulated to serve individual interest of sadist, masochist and tyrants.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's emphasis on treating people with humanity serves as a powerful basis for addressing the complex issues faced by both South Sudan and the global community. In a world marked by political conflict, social inequality, economic disparity, and religious tensions, a focus on humanity provides a path towards healing, understanding, and positive change. By fostering empathy, respect, and inclusivity, his approach offers valuable lessons on how to address and overcome the challenges of our time, aiming to create a world where dignity and compassion are central to all interactions and policies.

13. Imprisoned but Unmoved

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's imprisonment as part of his ministry provides a weighty insight into his character and commitment to his vocation. His motto drove him to embody a kind of rare courage which allowed him to stand every temptation even in the prison. Fr. Joseph never faltered even after coming out of prison. This talks a lot about who he was and the deep seated element that kept him standing.

His imprisonment for "telling the truth" indicates a profound commitment to integrity and justice. It suggests that he was willing to face personal risk and adversity to uphold his principles and advocate for what he believed was right. This courage in the face of

oppression or injustice is a testament to his strong moral and ethical convictions. Choosing to speak out despite knowing the potential consequences demonstrates a readiness to sacrifice personal comfort and safety for the greater good. This selflessness reflects a deep commitment to his mission and a readiness to endure hardships for the sake of justice and truth.

This signifies that Fr. Ukelo was actively challenging systems of oppression or corruption. His willingness to confront these issues publicly, even at great personal risk, highlights his dedication to social justice and his role as an advocate for the marginalized and voiceless.

Many missionaries have faced persecution for their efforts to address social injustices and advocate for human rights. Fr. Ukelo's experience is consistent with the historical role of missionaries who stand against systemic injustices. Persevering imprisonment can be seen as a testament to the strength of Fr. Ukelo's faith and his unwavering commitment to his mission. His ability to remain steadfast in his convictions while facing such trials speaks to the depth of his spiritual commitment and resilience. His experience can serve as an inspiration to others facing similar challenges. It demonstrates that standing up for one's principles, even under extreme duress, speaks to the strength of one's faith and commitment.

Willingness to endure imprisonment for the sake of speaking out against injustice reflects a deep empathy and compassion for those who suffer under oppressive systems. It shows that his commitment to treating people with humanity extends to confronting and addressing systemic issues that harm individuals and communities. His actions reveal a solidarity with those who are oppressed or marginalized. By taking a stand against injustices, even at personal risk, Fr. Ukelo aligns himself with those who face similar struggles and advocates for their rights and dignity.

He has that willingness to sacrifice personal safety for the sake of advocating for truth and the rights of the oppressed. This aspect of his life complements his broader mission of treating people with humanity, further talking of the depth of his empathy, resilience, and unwavering dedication to his vocation. Such experience manifest the profound impact that courageous and principled action can have in the fight for justice and the betterment of society.

14. Relationship with the Government

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's relationship with the governments of South Sudan and Sudan, especially in light of his advocacy for the marginalized and his experiences with imprisonment, reflects the complex dynamics between religious leaders and political authorities in regions experiencing conflict and political instability. This relationship was staggering in the side of Ukelo. Because voicing out the discrimination and oppression could not rest well with the political leaders of his time. He spoke against the Arabs when they were in power and equally admonish the SPLM leadership when they took over power. Showing that his central concern was the safety and dignity of the people of Sudan and Southern Sudan at that time and until the day he departed to the father's house.

His commitment to speaking out against injustice and advocating for the rights of the marginalized often put him at odds with political authorities. His efforts to defend the voiceless and challenge systemic abuses may have brought him into direct conflict with the governments of Sudan and South Sudan. His imprisonment for "telling the truth" suggests that his advocacy was perceived as a threat by those in power, who might have viewed his actions as undermining their authority or exposing their shortcomings.

In many contexts, including South Sudan and Sudan, governments have historically been known to repress dissent and target those who challenge their authority or expose corruption. Fr. Ukelo's imprisonment mirrors a broader pattern where outspoken critics and human rights defenders are often silenced through detention or persecution. His imprisonment can be seen as a response from the authorities to maintain control and suppress criticism.

Despite potential conflicts, religious leaders like Fr. Ukelo often engage with governments to address humanitarian needs and work towards common goals. His efforts to build communities, provide aid, and promote social justice would have required some level of interaction with governmental bodies, even if his critical stance created friction.

In both South Sudan and Sudan, political instability and conflict have complicated relationships between religious organizations and the State. Fr. Ukelo's work in such environments would have been challenged by the volatile political climate, which could affect both his ability to operate and his relationship with government officials.

South Sudan, having faced ongoing conflict and governance issues since its independence, presents a challenging environment for anyone advocating for social justice. Fr. Ukelo's commitment to addressing human rights abuses and advocating for the marginalized would have intersected with the complexities of South Sudan's political landscape, where issues of ethnic division, corruption, and violence are prevalent.

Sudan, under various authoritarian regimes, has also experienced significant human rights abuses and repression of dissent. Fr. Ukelo's critical stance and advocacy for truth and justice would have likely been viewed unfavorably by the government, leading to potential confrontations and repression.

Despite these challenges, his commitment to treating people with humanity and his efforts to support marginalized communities illustrate the significant impact of his work and the enduring struggle for justice in these regions.

15. A Victim of Racism

Ukelo lived during times when racism and colonialism rocked the world especially in Africa. During my Prepostulancy, he narrated several stories of how the superiority and inferiority mentality between the white and the black impacted his life and missionary work. He worked in South Africa, a nation which was torn by apartheid. In one occasion, he told us how he had to dismantle the system in the parish community where he worked. For the white had their church building, while the blacks had their own. Fr. Ukelo was able to bring all of them together under one roof and one altar of God. This testifies to how he was admired by the people in South Africa and consequently named the parish church, "St Joseph."

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's experience of racism, despite his committed missionary work, sheds light on the complex intersections of faith, identity, and systemic prejudice. Racism in any setting, including religious ones, can have profound effects on individuals and their work. One wonders whether God is white, colored or black. Somebody once said, "I don't care, the road to heaven does not pass through your door." It can be funny but it is to say that nobody holds the keys to God except God himself. So, racism is a failure in maintaining harmony in human relationship. It is a vice that destroys esteem, confidence and respect for one another.

Experiencing racism can often force individuals to develop a deeper sense of inner strength and resilience. For Fr. Ukelo, confronting racism could have reinforced his determination to overcome adversity and maintain his commitment to his mission and values. The challenges posed by racism might have fueled his resolve to prove the worth of his work and his dedication to serving others despite the prejudice he faced.

Facing racism may have strengthened his resolve to advocate for justice and equality. The experience of discrimination can heighten awareness of the need for systemic change, motivating individuals to work even harder towards creating a more equitable environment. Fr. Ukelo's experiences might have further fueled his commitment to defending the rights of the marginalized and speaking out against injustice. Experiencing racism firsthand can enhance one's empathy towards others facing discrimination. Fr. Ukelo's personal encounter with prejudice could have deepened his understanding of the struggles faced by others, enriching his ability to connect with and support marginalized communities in a meaningful way.

Racism fundamentally contradicts the core values of most religious teachings, which emphasize the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings. In a religious setting, where principles of love, compassion, and justice are central, racism represents a profound ethical and moral failure. Experiencing racism in such a context can be particularly disheartening, as it reveals a disconnect between religious ideals and actual practices. Racism within a religious community can undermine the sense of unity and fellowship that is often a cornerstone of religious life. It can create divisions and alienate individuals based on race or ethnicity, affecting the overall harmony and effectiveness of the community's mission.

Racism can strain relationships between missionaries and their counterparts or those they serve. It can create barriers to collaboration and mutual respect, complicating efforts to work effectively within diverse contexts. For Fr. Ukelo, encountering racism could have made his missionary work more challenging, requiring him to navigate not only the typical obstacles of his mission but also the added burden of prejudice.

Addressing racism within religious settings can also present an opportunity for reform and growth. Confronting and overcoming prejudice can lead to a more inclusive and supportive environment, strengthening the community's commitment to its core values and mission. Fr.

Ukelo's experiences might have contributed to broader efforts to address and rectify issues of racism within religious and missionary contexts.

Overcoming the challenges posed by racism can enhance an individual's leadership skills. Fr. Ukelo's ability to persevere and continue his work despite experiencing discrimination likely developed his capacity for resilience, empathy, and effective leadership, further strengthening his role as a missionary and advocate. His response to racism and his continued dedication to his mission can serve as a powerful model for others facing similar challenges. Demonstrating how to navigate and overcome prejudice while maintaining one's commitment to a mission can inspire and guide others in their own efforts to address and combat discrimination.

Despite his dedicated missionary work, this experience shows the complex interplay between personal adversity and professional resilience. While racism in a religious setting represents a profound contradiction to the core values of most faith traditions, it also provides an opportunity for personal growth, increased empathy, and strengthened resolve. Ukelo's ability to continue his work and maintain his commitment to justice and compassion, despite the prejudice he faced, underscores his remarkable resilience and serves as an inspiring example of how to confront and overcome systemic discrimination while upholding one's core values and mission.

16. Narrowly Escaped Death

Ukelo recounted to us how he was nearly crushed by a lorry of the soldiers in Juba. He was driving a land cruiser. Shortly, he realized a lorry of the army following his car consistently with a deadening speed. Aware of his relationship with the government, how fragile it was, Ukelo became suspicious. So, he tried to drive as fast as he could but it was overwhelming. After losing hope and inexplicable navigation, knowing he was going to be crushed, Ukelo told us he found himself on a side pavement. He could not explain how the car managed to get there – all he could say is that God worked his miracle and saved him.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's testimony about narrowly escaping death at the hands of the Sudanese government is a powerful and dramatic image of the extreme risks faced by those who challenge authoritarian regimes and advocate for justice. His experience offers profound insights into the nature of his mission, the severity of the political climate, and the broader implications for understanding resistance and resilience in the face of persecution.

This near-death experience at the hands of the government reveals the grave dangers faced by individuals who speak out against oppressive regimes. His situation shows the lengths to which such regimes will go to suppress dissent and eliminate voices that challenge their authority. The fact that he was hunted by the government indicates that his advocacy for justice and truth was perceived as a significant threat. The miraculous escape from being crushed by a military vehicle speaks to the perilous conditions under which he operated. It also suggests that his survival in the face of such threats may have been viewed as an act of divine intervention and protection, reinforcing his sense of mission and purpose despite the dangers.

That ability to continue his work despite being hunted for assassination reveals remarkable courage and resilience. The personal danger he faced did not deter him from his mission, demonstrating a profound commitment to his principles and a willingness to endure extreme risks for the sake of justice and truth. Escaping such a dire situation might have reinforced Fr. Ukelo's resolve and commitment to his mission. Experiencing such close calls can often deepen one's sense of purpose and clarify the importance of one's work, leading to an even stronger dedication to the cause.

His story emphasizes the critical role that religious leaders can play in resisting oppression and advocating for human rights. Despite the dangers, leaders like Fr. Ukelo often find themselves on the front lines of social and political battles, using their platforms to challenge injustice and promote ethical values. The miraculous nature of his escape could be interpreted as a sign of divine protection or intervention. For Fr. Ukelo, this experience might have reinforced his faith and belief in a higher purpose guiding and sustaining his mission. His survival and continued advocacy can be seen as a powerful witness to the strength of faith and the moral imperative to stand up for justice. It accentuates the idea that significant personal risk and sacrifice are sometimes necessary to uphold fundamental

Therefore, such a miraculous escape from assassination by the Sudanese government unveils the severe risks faced by those who challenge oppressive regimes and advocate for justice. His survival in such perilous circumstances is a testament to his courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to his mission. This experience not only highlights the brutal nature of political repression but also reinforces the moral and spiritual strength required to confront such adversity. This is a story serves as a powerful example of how faith, courage, and dedication can drive individuals to continue their important work despite the dangers they may face.

17. A Very Strict and Principled Priest

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's strictness with time and adherence to principles, along with his openness to correction, provide a nuanced view of his character and approach to leadership. These aspects of his life manifest discipline, integrity, and personal growth. My personal experience of Ukelo substantiates this. Whenever we have a visit outside or program to attend, Fr. Ukelo, old as he was – was the first person to bath, dress and wait for the young strong men to come. I wondered how the father had developed such discipline. It is indeed very incredible but inspiring too; imagine an 84-year-old wakes earlier than the procrastinating 20-year-old man! This reveals some aspects of his life and missionary formation.

Whenever we were late, he will tell us that if he was the driver – he will definitely drive of and leave us in the house. And we were like, "What!!" nonetheless, little did we know how long he nurtured such discipline and how much it has helped him to live his missionary vocation at the service of the people. As a priest, he advised us not to allow the congregants wait so long while we sleep of and do our own things in the house. We should observe time and feed people with the Gospel appropriately.

This strictness with time is a sign of professionalism and efficiency. In any organizational or leadership role, punctuality is a key indicator of respect for others' time and the effective

management of resources. By emphasizing the importance of adhering to agreed schedules, he set a standard of discipline and responsibility.

His approach to punctuality also serves as a teaching tool. By enforcing strict adherence to time, Fr. Ukelo demonstrated the value of discipline and the importance of respecting commitments. This approach helps to instill these values in those he leads, encouraging them to adopt a similar attitude towards responsibility and time management. While his strictness might have led to situations where he left the sisters behind, it revealed his belief in the importance of accountability. Such actions might have been intended to pinpoint the consequences of not respecting agreed-upon schedules, thereby fostering a greater sense of accountability and responsibility among those he worked with.

This is a strong moral and ethical behavior although sometimes it created tension between him and others. His commitment to correcting errors and maintaining high standards indicates a leadership style grounded in integrity and a desire to uphold the values he believes in. This approach helps to create a culture of excellence and ethical behavior.

By being strict with time and principles, Fr. Ukelo provided a sense of consistency and reliability. This predictability can help build trust and respect among those he leads, as they know what to expect and understand the standards they are held to. Consistent behavior from leaders fosters a sense of security and stability within a community or organization.

This is a leader who is deeply committed to discipline, integrity, and personal growth. His approach reflects a strong sense of responsibility and a desire to set high standards while also valuing continuous improvement and feedback. These qualities contribute to his effectiveness as a leader and serve as valuable lessons in balancing authority with compassion, maintaining consistency, and fostering a culture of excellence and mutual respect.

18. The Grace of God Working in His Life

The life of Ukelo, marked by his resilience through adversity, his commitment to justice, and his survival in the face of numerous dangers, can be seen as a profound testimony to the grace of God working in his life. The notion of divine grace, often understood as the unearned favor of God, is reflected in several aspects of Fr. Yala's experiences and achievements. Serving as a missionary for 50 years is an evidence of a life lived in service to God and humanity. Remember these were tough moments for South Sudan as a nation. Many of his colleagues could not make it; but God protected Ukelo because of the special mission he planned for him.

The miraculous escape from being crushed by a military vehicle and his survival despite being hunted by the Sudanese government suggest a form of divine protection. Such instances of near-death experiences can be seen as signs of God's grace intervening to preserve his life for a greater purpose. This is the purpose which he lived to fulfil; doing God's will to the very last breath of his earthly life. For he was aware that the God he served was a living, powerful, merciful and caring God; he is always at his side.

Living to the age of 84 despite the tumultuous and dangerous circumstances he faced is another reflection of divine grace. His extended life allowed him to continue his mission and impact many lives, which can be viewed as a manifestation of God's sustaining grace. The strength and resilience Fr. Yala displayed through his trials (whether facing imprisonment, navigating racial prejudice, or dealing with political oppression) can be attributed to the grace of God. This grace often manifests as inner strength, enabling individuals to endure hardships and continue their mission with unwavering commitment.

The ability to remain steadfast in his mission and continue advocating for justice and human rights in the face of adversity can be seen as a result of divine grace guiding and empowering his efforts. The sense of purpose and clarity he demonstrated in his work reflects the spiritual support and guidance that grace provides.

The significant impact Fr. Ukelo had on the communities he served (through building churches, advocating for the marginalized, and fostering a sense of unity) reflects the fruits of divine grace at work in his life. His ministry's success and the respect he garnered from those he served pinpoints the effectiveness of his work, which can be seen as a blessing from God.

The way Fr. Ukelo's life continues to inspire and serve as a role model for others is a witness to the lasting influence of divine grace. His legacy of courage, compassion, and dedication serves as a symbol of hope and encouragement for future generations.

His leadership qualities, including his adherence to principles, openness to correction, and ability to foster strong communities, reflect a wisdom that can be attributed to divine guidance. The grace of God often provides insight and wisdom that helps individuals navigate complex situations and lead effectively. Fr. Ukelo's commitment to moral and ethical principles, despite the personal risks he faced, demonstrates the influence of divine grace in shaping his character and guiding his actions. His adherence to truth and justice reflects a deep spiritual foundation that can be seen as a result of God's grace.

Throughout his life, Fr. Ukelo's faith provided him with strength and perseverance. The grace of God often manifests as spiritual sustenance, giving individuals the fortitude to face trials and continue their mission. His faith and trust in God's plan likely played a crucial role in sustaining him through difficult times. The sense of fulfillment and joy Fr. Ukelo expressed in his ministry, despite the challenges, indicates a profound experience of spiritual grace. The satisfaction he derived from serving others and fulfilling his mission can be seen as a result of divine grace working through his life and efforts.

God's grace and work in Ukelo's life is self-evident. This grace is reflected in his protection, strength, wisdom, and enduring legacy. Despite the tumultuous times he faced, the grace of God provided him with the resilience, guidance, and spiritual sustenance needed to continue his mission and make a lasting impact. His life serves as a powerful example of how divine grace can work through individuals to achieve remarkable outcomes and inspire others.

19. Insights into His Motto (Mt. 5:37)

Matthew 5:37, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one," is part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus provides ethical teachings on various aspects of life. To understand this verse hermeneutically, let's enter into its context, interpretation, and implications:

This verse is situated within Jesus' teaching on righteousness, ethics, and personal conduct. The Sermon on the Mount addresses how believers should live out their faith in practical terms, giving importance to inner purity and integrity. In the immediate context of Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus addresses the issue of oaths. He contrasts the traditional Jewish practice of making oaths with His call for straightforward honesty. Traditionally, Jews would swear oaths to affirm the truthfulness of their statements, often invoking God or other sacred things as guarantees.

Jesus advocates for simplicity and integrity in communication. By saying "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'," He is instructing His followers to be clear and truthful without the need for oaths or elaborate affirmations. The idea is that a person's word should be trustworthy and reliable, making oaths unnecessary. The latter part of the verse, "anything more than this comes from the evil one," suggests that any attempt to embellish or fortify one's statements with oaths can be a sign of underlying deceit or manipulation. It implies that excessive reliance on oaths or promises can indicate an attempt to deceive or manipulate others, which is contrary to the integrity Jesus calls for.

Hermeneutically, this verse emphasizes the importance of consistency and reliability in one's character. Jesus calls for a standard of truthfulness where one's words align with their actions. This consistency reflects a deeper integrity and aligns with the moral teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. The phrase "anything more than this comes from the evil one" can be understood as a spiritual warning against the dangers of deceit and dishonesty. It suggests that attempts to manipulate or deceive through complex assurances or falsehoods are aligned with malevolent influences, rather than the truth and righteousness that come from God.

For individuals, this teaching calls for straightforwardness and honesty in all interactions. It encourages believers to cultivate a reputation for reliability and integrity, where their words are inherently trustworthy without needing additional guarantees. In relationships, this principle fosters trust and transparency. By adhering to simplicity in promises and statements, individuals create a foundation of trust and avoid the pitfalls of deceit or manipulation.

Generally, this teaching can be applied to social and ethical settings where honesty is crucial. It calls for transparency and ethical conduct in governance, business, and other spheres, aligning with the moral vision of integrity that Jesus advocates.

Jesus' teaching contrasts with the Jewish tradition of making oaths and using them to bolster the truthfulness of one's words. The new emphasis is on inherent truthfulness rather than external validation through oaths. In today's context, this verse is relevant in advocating for straightforward communication and honesty in a world where deceit and manipulation are common. It calls for a return to fundamental values of truth and integrity in both personal and public life.

Therefore, Matthew 5:37 captures a call for simplicity, honesty, and integrity in communication. By urging that one's "Yes" be "Yes" and "No" be "No," Jesus emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and consistency, advocating that one's word should be trustworthy without the need for additional assurances. This teaching reflects a broader ethical and spiritual principle, encouraging believers to embody integrity and avoid the deceitful tendencies that arise from elaborate oaths or promises. The verse underscores the significance of honest and straightforward communication as a reflection of moral and spiritual truth.

20. Why He Chose Mt. 5:37 As His Motto

This echoes a deep commitment to the values of truth, integrity, and moral clarity. Several factors could have inspired him to adopt this verse as his guiding principle. It is difficult to the intention of another person because it is well articulated in the head.

This verse emphasizes the importance of honesty and integrity in communication. Fr. Ukelo's commitment to truthfulness and straightforwardness aligns with his role as a missionary dedicated to justice and advocacy. Choosing this verse shows his desire to live by and uphold these values, both in his personal life and in his ministry. As a missionary, especially in contexts marked by political and social turmoil, maintaining truth and honesty was crucial. Fr. Ukelo's advocacy for the oppressed and his work in challenging environments required a steadfast commitment to truth. This verse could have served as a guiding light for his efforts to speak out against injustice and maintain ethical integrity.

In challenging situations, the ability to rely on one's own truthfulness and the clarity of one's mission becomes vital. The verse reflects his understanding that amidst adversity, remaining true to one's words and principles is essential for maintaining moral and spiritual integrity. His experiences in dangerous and complex situations, such as his near-death encounters and struggles against oppressive regimes, could have reinforced the value of unwavering honesty and simplicity. The verse likely provided him with a background for navigating these trials with clarity and moral fortitude. Embracing this teaching may have been a way to ground his actions and decisions in the ethical and moral guidance provided by the Gospel. It unveils a desire to embody the teachings of Christ in his daily life and mission.

The Comboni Missionaries are known for their dedication to justice and the service of the marginalized. Fr. Ukelo's choice of this verse aligns with the broader Comboni mission of advocating for the truth and serving with integrity. It may have served as a personal embodiment of the Comboni founder's vision and principles. They emphasize ethical conduct and moral integrity, which are reflected in Fr. Ukelo's choice of Matthew 5:37. His commitment to living by this motto aligns with the values promoted by the Comboni Missionaries and underscores his dedication to upholding these principles in his work. Fr. Yala's life was a testimony to the values expressed in Matthew 5:37. His reputation for truthfulness and integrity in his interactions with others likely influenced his decision to

adopt this verse as a motto. By embodying these values, he set an example for others to follow, demonstrating the practical application of this Gospel teaching in his life. By choosing this verse, Fr. Ukelo not only guided his own life but also provided a model for others in his community and beyond. His commitment to living by this motto served as an inspiration and a reminder of the importance of honesty and straightforwardness in all aspects of life.

The choice of Matthew 5:37 as his motto mirrors his deep commitment to truth, integrity, and ethical living. Inspired by his missionary work, experiences of adversity, spiritual convictions, and the Comboni Missionary spirit, this verse served as a guiding principle in his life. It provided him with a framework for maintaining moral clarity and consistency, reinforcing his dedication to justice and honesty in his mission. The verse encapsulates the essence of his approach to life and ministry, illustrating how deeply he valued the principles of truthfulness and straightforwardness.

21. Poems in Honor of Fr. Ukelo

As a poet, I have decided to write my emotions, and feelings about Fr. Ukelo. These are tears shedding in the paper. Tears which can only be seen in the verses; no fluid, no

sobbing, no noise – just tears flowing in the heart. When I am bored, I read them; again and again. To remember a man who provoke my life, vocation and social view.

Ode to Fr. Joseph Ukelo

In shadows deep, where echoes weep and cry,
A guiding light stood, where others feared to tread,
With courage bold beneath the stormy sky,
He forged a path where angels dared to tread.

Amidst the chains, where cold and darkness bind,
He spoke the truth with every breath he took,
With every word, a flame to light the blind,
A steadfast heart, as faithful as a book.

Through fire and strife, in lands where whispers soar,
He bore the weight of justice on his chest,
And in the struggle, he was ever more
A living light, a soul by grace possessed.

His “Yes” was truth, his “No” a steadfast call,
In peril's face, where others might have fled,
He stood with honor, never to enthrall
The evil that in shadows lurked and spread.

With every dawn, his spirit young and bright,
In every parish, where his love did flow,
The tears of parting told of endless light,
A legacy of warmth for hearts to know.

Now in the silence, where his journey ends,

His name shall echo in the halls of grace,
A hero’s tale, where heaven’s light descends,
Fr. Joseph, cherished in God’s embrace.

Legacy of the Unseen

From distant lands where hope was frail and thin,
A figure walked, both humble and profound,
Through trials fierce and battles deep within,
He turned the night into a sacred ground.

His voice, a whisper 'gainst the roaring tide,
Spoke truth to power with unwavering might,
In chains of iron, he refused to hide,
A testament to freedom’s sacred light.

Where shadows loomed and silence often reigned,
He stood alone, yet never in despair,
With each injustice, his resolve unchained,
He wove a tapestry of love and care.

Through storms of hate and tempest’s cruel roar,
His faith was anchored, unrelenting, strong,
In every heart he touched, he left a door,
A pathway where the weary could belong.

Though often seen through trials' harshest glare,
He bore the mark of grace upon his soul,
A beacon in the dark, beyond compare,
With every step, he made the broken whole.

Now in the echoes of the past's embrace,
His legacy, like whispers in the wind,
Lives on in stories of a boundless grace,
A silent strength where truth and love begin.

Journey of a Visionary Heart

The lands where cries of anguish pierced the air,
A soul of fire emerged, defying fate,
With eyes that saw beyond the worldly snare,
He charted paths where few would dare to wait.

Through nights of fear and days of bitter strife,
He walked with vision, hope his guiding star,
In every hardship, he found seeds of life,
And turned the pain to miracles afar.

Where shadows lurked and darkness sought to claim,
He stood as light, a beacon fierce and true,
With every challenge, ever bold acclaim,
He shaped a legacy of strength anew.

In parishes where echoes softly fade,
His spirit lingered, gentle, yet profound,
He built more than just walls of stone and shade,
He crafted bonds where deep affection's found.

Amidst the storm, his heart remained a guide,
Through trials vast and struggles dark and cold,

He bore the torch where others might have died,
A visionary's tale in silence told.

Now in the quiet where the whispers rest,
His journey lives, a testament to grace,
In every heart that found its place, confessed,
Fr. Joseph's love and light will interlace.

Echoes of a Fearless Heart

The South Sudan where hope was often worn and torn,
A heart of courage beat against the gale,
Defying darkness from the early morn,
With every step, he left a lasting trail.

Through trials fierce and storms that roared with might,
He walked with faith as his unyielding guide,
In every struggle, found a glimmered light,
A testament to grace that would abide.

When shadows loomed and threats were closing in,
His voice rang out, a call to truth and peace,
With every challenge faced, he'd never spin,
But stood his ground, where justice would not cease.

Where many faltered, he remained steadfast,
A champion for the voiceless, the oppressed,
With each encounter, made the moment last,
A beacon for the weary, warmly blessed.

In stories whispered through the winds of time,
His legacy is etched in hearts of gold,
A fearless spirit in a world sublime,
Whose echoes of conviction still unfold.

Now as the dawn of memory softly fades,
His journey's light continues to ignite,
In every soul he touched, his love cascades,
Fr. Joseph's flame, forever burning bright.

A Light in My Darkness

Quiet moments where the shadows creep,
I feel the absence of your guiding grace,
Fr. Joseph, in my heart, your memory keeps,
A cherished light no longer in my space.

Each dawn, I search for your reassuring voice,
The counsel wise that calmed my troubled soul,
Now silence fills the space where once was choice,
And loneliness has taken such a toll.

I weep for times when you would gently guide,
With wisdom vast and kindness in your heart,
In your presence, I found a friend inside,
A compass lost as we must now depart.

Your words, a balm for all my deepest fears,
Now echo softly in the tears I shed,
In every prayer, I find a place for tears,

A space where grief and love are gently wed.

In every whisper of the wind, I hear
A fragment of your wisdom's gentle call,
Though you've departed, I still hold you near,
A treasured guide who taught me to stand tall.

Simon Lodai Amin, I feel the ache,
For in your absence, my heart's deeply stirred,
Yet in the sorrow, I find strength to make
A path where your enduring love is heard.

Mourning Our Beloved Son

Where ancient rivers gently flow,
Where Pari hearts beat strong and spirits rise,
We mourn a loss that time can scarcely show,
Our cherished son, whose light now fills the skies.

Fr. Joseph, from our fold, our pride and grace,
You walked among us with a heart so true,
Your wisdom, like the sun, would gently trace,
The paths of those who sought the light from you.

In every village where your spirit shone,
You brought us hope and warmth in darkened days,
Now in our hearts, a hollow space has grown,
A void where once your tender guidance swayed.

We remember you with tears that softly fall,

For in our land, your absence leaves a scar,
A tribute to a son who gave his all,
A guiding star, a beacon from afar.

The Pari people grieve the loss so dear,
Yet in our sorrow, find a strength to stand,
For in your deeds and love, we hold you near,
A legacy inscribed upon our land.

Though we weep for you, our hearts will find
In memories and prayers, your spirit's grace,
For Fr. Joseph's love is left behind,
A symbol of hope in our lives, a warm embrace.

A Faithful Son of the Church

With believe so deep,
Ukelo gets on the sacraments,
Proclaiming the risen Lord in deed,
Paving the way for Gospel Success.

A disciple, meek so faithfully,
Dear like a deer, holds onto the Church,
His name, so lovely,
A naming ringing the bell of St. Joseph.

He lives in realm of eternity,
So fragrant with heavenly aroma,
Fully shining in the light of his master,
The race is over so to roam.

I thought of

I thought of a Joseph,
A man so benevolent,
A priest so safe,
In the wings of his master's tent.

Of his destiny, man knows not,
His spirit hoovers,
Looking for souls for Christ' lot,
To his heavenly assembly gathers.

I thought of a man with his words,
Holding but on his lips,
A sword with fire flaming wood,
He calls for repentance of untruthful lips.

The Man

His life, my light,
His words my pillow,
His critics my plight.

His photo my night dream,
His voice my alarm,
My love for his realm.

His courage my driver,
His determination my energy,
His perseverance my giving up never,

His priesthood my hope,

His vocation my map,

His destiny my home.

To die is to live

To die is to live,

To live is to die,

Ukelo died to live.

To suffer is to rejoice,

To rejoice is to suffer,

Ukelo suffered to rejoice.

To love is to be hated,

To be hated is to love,

Ukelo loved and was hated.

To cry is to laugh,

To laugh is to cry,

Ukelo cried and so laughs.

22. Legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's legacy is a blend of compassion, resilience, and transformative leadership. His life and work left an indelible mark on the communities he served, the Church, and the world. The testimonies tell us of the enduring legacy of Ukelo, his encounter with people, life and the world.

Fr. Joseph's approach to community development went beyond mere physical structures or organizational improvements. His work in South Sudan and the broader region was transformative in its ability to reshape communities at their core. He stressed on the

importance of empowering local communities, encouraging them to take active roles in their development. By fostering participation and responsibility, he helped to build resilient communities capable of self-sustenance and growth.

His contributions were holistic, addressing not only the spiritual needs of his congregants but also their social and economic well-being. This comprehensive approach facilitated long-term improvements and left a legacy of self-reliance and communal strength. Fr. Joseph's advocacy for social justice and human rights was a cornerstone of his ministry. His commitment to speaking out against oppression and injustice spoke of his role as a moral leader. His willingness to confront injustices and stand up for marginalized groups made him a crucial advocate for the oppressed. His voice challenged systems of power and called for a more equitable and humane society. His moral courage was evident in his readiness to face personal risks, including imprisonment, for the sake of justice. This courage served as a powerful example of how one's faith and values can drive actions that seek to change unjust systems.

Fr. Joseph's role as a spiritual guide was marked by his deep understanding of faith and his ability to impart that understanding to others. His spiritual direction was characterized by profound wisdom and empathy. He offered guidance that was both grounded in theological insight and sensitive to the practical realities of those he served. His own life was a testament to the values he preached. His adherence to principles such as honesty, integrity, and humility provided a model for others to follow, reinforcing the teachings of the Church through his lived example.

His contributions to the institutional structures of the Church, particularly within the Diocese of Torit, were pivotal in shaping the diocesan community. His efforts in reforming and strengthening the Diocese of Torit demonstrated his commitment to building robust ecclesiastical institutions capable of serving the needs of their communities effectively. By fostering a sense of unity and purpose within the diocese, he helped to create a vibrant and active Christian community. His leadership in this area ensured that the Church could continue its mission of service and spiritual growth.

Education was a significant aspect of His legacy, reflecting his belief in the power of knowledge and moral instruction. His efforts to promote education and provide opportunities

for learning were instrumental in empowering individuals and communities. By prioritizing education, he helped to uplift future generations and foster a culture of intellectual and moral growth. His teachings extended beyond the classroom, influencing the moral and ethical development of those he encountered. His emphasis on integrity and ethical conduct left a lasting impact on the moral fabric of the communities he served.

Fr. Joseph's life and ministry were marked by remarkable resilience and endurance, qualities that are central to his legacy. His ability to persevere through significant challenges, including political and social unrest, reflected a deep inner strength and commitment to his mission. This resilience was a source of inspiration and a testament to his unwavering dedication. The endurance of his influence is seen in the continued respect and admiration he commands. His legacy endures through the ongoing impact of his work and the values he instilled in those he served.

The personal relationships Fr. Joseph built were as significant as his broader contributions, illustrating the depth of his impact on individuals. Many individuals who were mentored or guided by him continue to carry forward the lessons he imparted. His personal impact on these individuals is a testament to his ability to inspire and uplift others on a personal level. His genuine relationships with members of his communities, characterized by empathy and understanding, fostered deep connections that continue to influence and inspire.

This legacy is a complex one, characterized by his transformative contributions to community development, his advocacy for social justice, and his profound impact on spiritual and institutional leadership. His resilience, educational efforts, and personal relationships have left a lasting imprint on the lives of many. Through his life and work, he demonstrated how dedication to one's mission can effect meaningful and enduring change. As we reflect on his legacy, we recognize the profound ways in which he shaped the world around him, leaving behind a legacy of hope, justice, and spiritual growth that continues to inspire and guide future generations.

23. Personality from the Psychological Take

To understand Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's personality from a psychological perspective, it is essential to examine various aspects of his character, motivations, and behaviors. His life,

marked by resilience, commitment, and profound impact on others, provides rich material for psychological analysis. The ability to withstand numerous hardships (ranging from imprisonment and threats to facing the challenges of working in conflict zones) illustrates a high level of psychological resilience. Resilience refers to the capacity to recover from adversity and to adapt to stressful situations.

He demonstrated cognitive flexibility, the ability to adjust his thinking and strategies in response to changing circumstances. This flexibility was crucial in adapting to the complex and often hostile environments in which he worked. His continued dedication to his mission despite adversity suggests a strong sense of purpose and optimism. A clear sense of mission and hope can significantly bolster an individual's ability to cope with stress and overcome obstacles.

The motto, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no,” reflects a deep-seated commitment to personal integrity and authenticity. Psychologically, a strong alignment between one's values and actions, as seen in Fr. Joseph’s life, is associated with high levels of personal satisfaction and mental well-being. This consistency reduces cognitive dissonance; a psychological state where one's actions are at odds with their beliefs. His dedication to truth and justice aligns with high moral and ethical standards. These traits are often linked to strong internal motivation and a well-developed sense of self.

His role in advocating for the voiceless and addressing the needs of marginalized communities brings about his high emotional intelligence, particularly in the realm of empathy. His ability to connect with and respond to the suffering of others suggests a profound capacity for empathy. Emotional intelligence involves understanding and managing one's own emotions while recognizing and influencing the emotions of others. The leadership style of Ukelo was likely characterized by compassion and a deep concern for the well-being of others, which is indicative of a high level of emotional intelligence and social awareness.

Fr. Joseph’s impact as a leader, especially in transforming the Diocese of Torit and his role as vicar general, reflects traits of transformational leadership. A Leader who inspire and motivate others by creating a vision of what can be achieved. Fr. Joseph’s work in building and nurturing communities, despite numerous challenges, likely inspired and motivated

those around him. His willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of others demonstrates the selflessness often seen in effective leaders. This trait enhances his ability to influence and lead by example.

Experiences with imprisonment and other adversities could be analyzed through the lens of post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG is the positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances.[37] Instead of being solely defined by his traumas, Fr. Joseph used these experiences as a catalyst for personal and spiritual growth. This ability to transform adversity into a source of strength and resilience is a key feature of PTG. Adversity often enhances empathy and broadens one's perspective, traits that Fr. Joseph demonstrated throughout his ministry.

Meanwhile strict adherence to time and principles reflects a structured and principled approach to life. His disciplined approach, such as maintaining strict schedules, indicates a high level of conscientiousness, a personality trait associated with reliability, organization, and attention to detail. His commitment to correcting errors and accepting corrections demonstrates a principled and balanced approach, valuing both accountability and personal growth.

The ability to reflect on his actions and accept corrections suggests high self-awareness and adaptability. Self-awareness involves understanding one's own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses.[38] Fr. Joseph's openness to feedback and self-improvement reflects a mature and self-reflective personality. His capacity to adapt to various cultural and political environments demonstrates psychological adaptability, allowing him to remain effective in diverse and often challenging situations.

Therefore, Ukelo's personality, reveals a manifold individual shaped by resilience, integrity, empathy, and effective leadership. His life was characterized by a profound alignment between his values and actions, a deep commitment to serving others, and the ability to adapt and grow from adversity. His psychological profile provides how his personal qualities and

[37] Malhotra, Meeta, and Suma Chebiyan. "Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes following adversity-an overview." *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2016): 109-118.

[38] Showry, Mendemu, and K. V. L. Manasa. "Self-Awareness-Key to Effective Leadership." *IUP Journal of Soft Skills* 8, no. 1 (2014).

experiences shaped his impactful ministry, making him a remarkable figure whose legacy continues to inspire and guide others.

24.The Man and His Word

This title reflects not just the person he was but the profound alignment between his character and the values he espoused. It suggests a harmonious relationship between his actions and his teachings, a theme that is central to understanding Fr. Joseph's remarkable impact. Ukelo cannot be separated from his words because his life wrote his words, spoke his humanity and believe. There was a stiff dichotomy between him and his words. That middle ground was filled by reconciliation and forgiveness, making Ukelo a mastermind of what he preached.

"*The Man*" in the title represents Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala himself; his character, his commitment, and his profound dedication to his vocation. Throughout his 51 years of priesthood, Fr. Joseph exemplified integrity and authenticity. He was a man whose actions consistently reflected his values, and his life was a testament to the principles he held dear. His personal integrity and unwavering commitment to truth and justice were evident in every aspect of his ministry, from his advocacy for the oppressed to his role in building and nurturing communities.

"*His Word*" signifies the teachings, values, and messages that Fr. Joseph imparted through his ministry. It includes his spoken words, such as his sermons and teachings, as well as his lived example. Fr. Joseph's motto, drawn from Matthew 5:37; "Let your yes be yes and your no be no" perfectly explains how his words were not mere rhetoric but lived truths. His life was a testament to the power of aligning one's words with actions, making his teachings both compelling and credible.

The title "*The Man and His Word*" shows the alignment between Fr. Joseph's personal values and his public ministry. His advocacy for justice, compassion, and service was not just a set of ideals he preached but a way of life he lived. His role as a missionary, his advocacy for human rights, and his dedication to building and leading communities showed congruence between his personal convictions and his actions. His work in South Sudan, including his efforts to address social and political issues, exemplifies how his word (his

advocacy for justice and human dignity) was inseparable from his identity as a person of faith and integrity.

Hence, "*The Man and His Word*" is profoundly fitting for this reflection on the life of a man inseparable from his words. It shows a harmony between his personal character and his public ministry. His life was a seamless integration of his values and actions, making his teachings both impactful and authentic. This title honors Fr. Joseph as a person whose words and actions were deeply intertwined, showcasing a life of integrity, service, and continuous influence.

25.Lamentation and Farewell to Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala

In the stillness of this moment, we gather in sorrow and reverence, our hearts heavy with the weight of loss. Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, beloved shepherd of souls and tireless servant of God, has departed from this earthly realm. We are left to mourn, to reflect, and to bid a heartfelt farewell to a man whose life was a testament to unwavering faith, compassion, and courage.

Fr. Joseph, your departure leaves a void that words can scarcely fill. Your life, a compass of devotion and sacrifice, navigated against the conditions of a world fraught with trials. You walked among us with a grace that belied the struggles you faced. From the war-torn landscapes of South Sudan to the tranquil corners of our hearts, you touched lives in ways that will forever resonate. Your journey began in the heart of a land yearning for peace, and you answered the call with a spirit of profound dedication. You built bridges where there were divides, mended hearts that were broken, and illuminated paths obscured by darkness. Your mission was not merely a vocation but a living testament to the power of faith in action.

In your eyes, we saw the light of hope, a guiding light in the storm of conflict that raged around you. You stood as a sentinel of justice, voicing the pain of the voiceless and standing firm against the tides of oppression. Through imprisonment, hardship, and the trials of your own humanity, you remained steadfast. Your motto, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no," was more than a guiding principle; it was the very essence of your being, a reflection of your commitment to truth and integrity. We remember the sacrifices you made; the moments of solitude, the personal costs of your unwavering dedication. Yet, in every act, every gesture, every word of comfort, you embodied the essence of what it means to serve

selflessly. Your legacy is etched into the fabric of our lives, a drapery woven with threads of love, resilience, and unwavering faith.

To the Pari community, to the Diocese of Torit, the Comboni missionaries, to every soul you touched, your absence is felt as a profound loss. Your presence brought us together, a unifying force in times of division. The community you nurtured, the church you helped build, and the lives you transformed stand as enduring monuments to your life's work. In your absence, we grieve not only for the man who was but for the future we imagined with you still among us.

We remember the strength of your character; the strict adherence to time, the principles that guided your actions, and the relentless pursuit of truth. You corrected errors not out of judgment but out of a deep love for your community, guiding us with a firm yet compassionate hand. Your wisdom, your dedication, and your love for the people you served are irreplaceable. As we lay you to rest, as we pray for your peaceful rest; we reflect on the stamp you have left on our lives. Your teachings, your example, and your spirit continue to guide us. The challenges you faced, the battles you fought, and the victories you won have paved the way for us to follow in your footsteps. Your life's work is not just a chapter in history but a living legacy, a call to action for us to carry forward the torch of justice, compassion, and faith.

Rest in peace, dear Fr. Joseph. You have run the race, fought the good fight, and now you rest in the embrace of the Divine. Your memory will live on in our hearts, guiding us as we continue the work you began and honoring the profound impact you made on our lives and our world.

26. Conclusion

As we draw the final lines of this work, it is essential to pause and reflect on the profound legacy left by a man whose life embodied the true essence of faith, leadership, and service. Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's journey, marked by unwavering commitment and extraordinary resilience, stands as a powerful testament to the impact that one individual can have on the world.

Throughout his 51 years of dedicated priesthood, Fr. Joseph's contributions to the Catholic Church and the broader South Sudanese community were transformative. His tenure as Vicar General was characterized by a visionary approach to ministry and administration, which sought not only to reform and strengthen the diocese but also to foster a deeper sense of community and belonging among the faithful. His efforts in nurturing a vibrant spiritual life, coupled with his dedication to addressing social injustices, laid a solid foundation for future growth and development within the diocese.

His impact extended beyond the boundaries of administrative reforms. His personal connection with the communities he served was profound. Through his genuine care, compassion, and dedication, he touched the lives of countless individuals, creating lasting bonds and instilling a sense of hope and empowerment. The sorrow expressed by those he left behind and the gratitude of those he served are a testament to the depth of his influence.

The trials Fr. Joseph faced, including his imprisonment and experiences with racial prejudice, only served to deepen his commitment to his principles. His resilience in the face of adversity, guided by his motto from Matthew 5:37, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no; anything beyond that comes from the evil one," is a reminder of the importance of integrity and the strength found in remaining true to one's convictions. These challenges did not deter him but rather strengthened his resolve to stand up for justice and truth, embodying the essence of a life lived with purpose.

In reflecting on Fr. Joseph's life, it is also fundamental to acknowledge the wider context in which his work took place. South Sudan, with its rich cultural heritage and complex socio-political landscape, provided both a backdrop and a canvas for his ministry. The dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, conflict and reconciliation, underscored the significance of his work and the impact of his leadership.

This book is not only a tribute to Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala's remarkable life but also an invitation to reflect on the lessons his journey offered. His legacy challenge us to consider how we live our own lives, how we engage with our communities, and how we address the injustices we encounter. Fr. Joseph's example serves as an inspiration of hope, reminding us of the power of faith, the importance of compassion, and the transformative impact of dedicated service.

Several testimonies about him are positive. These testimonies are from people who listened to him, lived with him and have experience of him. They present to us who Fr. Ukelo was in different circumstances. It is indeed incredible to have such a person, friend, missionary and servant of God. Indeed, Ukelo was a friend of God and humanity.

As we close this reflection, let us carry forward the lessons learned from Fr. Joseph's life. May we be inspired by his unwavering commitment, his courage in the face of adversity, and his deep love for those he served. His story is a testament to the enduring power of faith and the difference one person can make in the world.

In honoring Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, we celebrate a life that has left a stamp in the hearts of those he touched and a legacy that will continue to inspire and guide future generations. His life reminds us that through faith, service, and resilience, we can overcome challenges and make a lasting impact on the world around us.

27. Indexes

i. Testimonies

Postulant Denis Dino Clement Auku's Testimony

Who is Denis Dino?

Denis Dino is a seminarian of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus who is pursuing his philosophical studies at Tangaza University, Nairobi. His Prepostulancy experience at Moroyok, Juba in the presence of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala provide credibility for his testimony. Dino is passionate about academics and writing. He possesses a rare conviction in his vocation with openness to discernment. His life style seems to be very much influenced by Fr. Ukelo's commitment to truth and humanity. Denis shows interest in the political uncertainties which continue to tear apart the bonds of peace initiated through long-term efforts. In his article, "*The Impact of Tribal Politics In South Sudan*"[39] Dino advocates for true leadership and an end to tribal politics. According to him, "Ignorance of politics, is the ignorance of truest leadership. Tribal politics stems from the line that is not far from that un spoken truth."[40] These are values embodied by Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala. This stands as a testimony to how Ukelo shaped young people to advocate and live the truth in their lives.

Here is what Denis had to say about Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala:

***"Before you become a Christian, first be human."*- Fr. Joseph Ukello Yala.**

On the evening of June 23, 2023, I reported to the pre-postulancy to begin my first stage of formation at the Fr. Barnaba Deng formation house in Moroyok. The first person that I met was Fr. Joseph Ukelo, who was sitting near the church. He was surrounded by children, so he could hardly see me from a distance. When I approached him, and upon seeing me, he warmly welcomed me; and I really felt at home, though it was my first day at the formation house.

This small gesture of love had a profound impact on me. From that first day, I had built confidence that I was in the right place, surrounded by the right people; something that has guided me throughout my entire pre-postulancy.

So, Fr. Ukelo's outstanding self is first defined by his love that is wrapped in embracing everyone who comes to him, whether known or unknown. *A good man is seen by his*

[39] Denis Dino, "The Impact of Tribal Politics in South Sudan." *Safe Africa Newsletter*, May-December 2024: 17.

[40] Dino, The Impact of Tribal Politics in South Sudan, 17.

welcoming spirit. His heart and hands are always open to welcome the needy, the vulnerable, and the most afflicted of all.

A Little Spark of Care

After I had spent approximately three months in the pre-postulancy, I felt sick. I hardly eat or talk. I was brought medicines by Fr. Alfred Mawadri, the then vice provincial, who was our formator. Fr. Ukelo, due to his age constraint, was unable to see me in the room where I was. He struggles to walk up to the verandah, and upon getting tired, he immediately asks for a chair to rest. After two minutes of resting, he called seminarian Michael Otongo. While I am inside the room, I hear him calling, *"Michael, Michael, how is Denis now? Did you check him?"* And Michael replied, Yes, Fr I have done that. Then he told him, ***"Please, take care of Denis!"***

This was *a little spark of care*! In it, his prayers speak for me. Moreover, it has created a great flame of love in my heart that made me believe I was not alone in my pain and suffering. And that has greatly uplifted my soul. So, there's always something medicinal in "care" given to the sick. Thus, Fr. Ukello was such "a little spark of care" to me that has helped me recover from my sickness.

A Supportive Vine of Vocations.

At the pre-postulancy, I was the last person who went to him for spiritual direction before he struggled with the sickness and breathed his last on 18 December 2023. During that time, I fell into crisis, trying to figure out whether it was worth it for me to continue with my vocational discernment. I was somehow confused.

Nonetheless, when I sincerely told him all the difficulties that I had, he supported me with great inspiration and hope that kept on pushing me up to date. He said to me, ***"Denis, know that every difficulty is solvable and no crisis is unchecked by God. Be open by surrendering to him, and your ways will be open everywhere, at all times."*** These words are the refuge of my inspiration when I am challenged, and a light of my hope when I am down, because they always geared my spirit towards confidence in the future to serve humanity.

In this case, Fr. Ukelo acted as a supportive vine of my vocation. In my crisis and weaknesses, he offered me strength to continue discerning the call of God in my life. I never

thought I would do that, but God worked in him to help me continue with this journey to wherever stage he would need me to be.

A Candle of Humanism.

In a room where darkness speaks, Fr. Ukelo becomes a candle that shuts it off. His spirit of humanism is far inexpressible by words. At once, he said, "When you do not feel remorse when you treat someone unjustly or inhumanely, then you are a danger to society. And when you fail to help the most afflicted, yet you have the resources, then you are not human." For him, what defines our humanity is our nature of kindness and love offered to others.

Christianity teaches us this values. However, given the fact that we are Christians, many people live in hatred and are very unkind to others. So, please, Ukelo was telling us, "before you become a Christian, first be human." What does this mean?

Naturally, there's no sane person who can hate himself. He must always love himself. More so, he must equally extend that kind of love to others. From this position, true humanness is defined. Nevertheless, Christianity comes in to perfect it, and once it is perfected, it cannot be weakened or manipulated by any frailty or temptation.

Interestingly, Fr. Ukelo was such a kind and loving person whose words matched his action. He lived his entire life in service to God and His people. In a society where injustice is practiced, he stands against it, and in a community where lies are rewarded, he challenges with truth. A well- principled man whose words remind the same whether pronounced in the day or at night - if it is YES, it is YES, and if it is NO, it is NO!

ii. Drama Performed in his honour

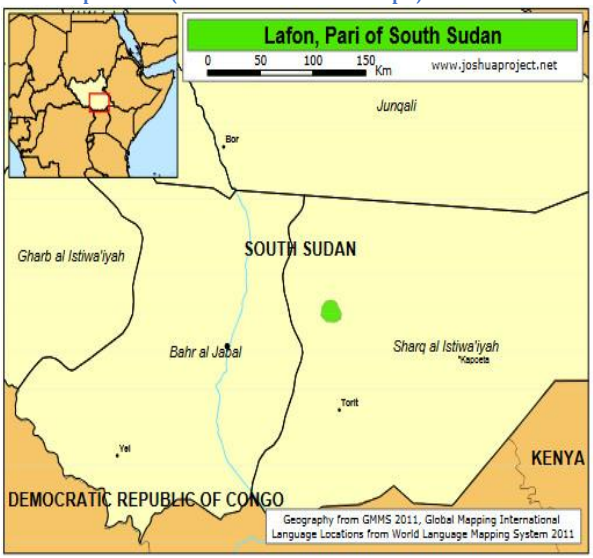
Drama: "Let your word be yes, yes or no, no. anything more is from the evil one"[41]

[41] This drama was acted by the Youth of Moroyok Chapel together with the Prepostulants in July 2022. This was during the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala. It was an amazing drama. I myself (Simon Lodai Aminson) acted as Fr. Joseph Ukelo. I could feel the grip of the suffering people and misery. I saw how dangerous and risky it is to speak the truth, to voice out for the good of others and the common good. The video is available. I personally masterminded the drama and this very script because I was close to Fr. Joseph who calls me "Ongie" and we have a deep connection. He tells me about his early life and priestly struggles. So, I had all I need to mastermind this drama.

Scene and cast	Video/activity
Scene one: News anchor |presenting the news Slide to: President issuing the decree |body guard accompanied.	…..The president of the Republic of South Sudan decrees that all Christian missionaries should leave the country and no humanitarian aid to be given to anybody in the country…….. "I president…. With the power vested on me do here by declare that all missionaries should leave the republic of South Sudan. No humanitarian aid should be distributed anywhere in South Sudan…."
Scene two: Father | Mother | Son | Any other | Leaving the stage with sorrow….	Christian families express their frustration for the decree of the president….. they yell in sorrow….Regret the expulsion of the missionaries and prohibition of humanitarian aid to people especially the poor.
Scene three: News anchor	More than 2000 Christians and educated South Sudanese were killed during a Holy Mass in St Theresa Cathedral, Kator. The president issues conversion of all South Sudanese to Islam, the day of prayer being now Friday. Violation of such decrees would lead to 200 years in prison…..
Scene four: Fr. Joseph | Christians | Attacked by: Security guards Taken to Prison Christians quarrel and become frustrated	It is not just/Right to kill your own people. The president is leading the country as if it is his family. Why do you kill intellectuals and innocent christians who could not even say a word against you falsely? Let us stand for the truth. Food should reach the needy. I condemn the president not because I hate him, but because I hate his administration. Let us pray that God will deliver us from the dictatorship of this devil……. ….security arrest him while giving aid to the congregants…locked in prison
Scene five: News Anchor | reads the news |	A comprehensive peace agreement was signed yesterday between Sudanese government and The SPLM. The agreement decrees the release of all prisoners of war and detainees. Fr. Joseph who was arrested was one of the detainee who was released from Juba main prison.

Scene six: Fr. Joseph Ukello | Christians |Homily |Kator	If we stand and trust Jesus we would always stand the trials life posts to us. Through his body and blood, he has given us live. There by the signing of this peace agreement…… ***"Let Our 'YES' to peace remain 'YES' and Our 'NO' to war and discrimination remains 'NO"***

iii. Map of Lafon (Inhabitance of the Pari People)



[42]

[42] Africa 101 Last Tribes, *List Tribes*. n.d. https://www.101lasttribes.com/tribes/pari.html#:~:text=Pari%20/%20Lafon-,Pari%20(also%20spelled%20Paeri)%20is%20an%20ethnic%20group%20in%20South%20Sudan,Peoplegroups.org.-Home (accessed 8 14, 2024).

iv. Map of Sudan and South Sudan

[43]

[44]

[43] Collins, R.O., Sikainga, A.A., Sabr, M.E.D., Spaulding, J.L. "South Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 19, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan. (accessed December 22, 2025)

[44] Al-Shahi, A.S., Spaulding, J.L., Collins, R.O., Sabr, M.E.D., Sikainga, A.A., Unit, E.I. "Sudan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 19, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan. (accessed December 22, 2025)

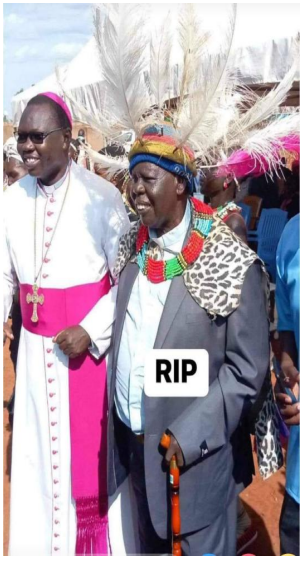
v. Missions of the Comboni Missionaries

45

vi. Photos of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala

Torit Freedom Square

[45] Comboni Lay Missionaries, *The Comboni Family*, https://www.lmcomboni.org/paginas/familiacombonianaEN.html (accessed 22 December 2025)



Ukelo with Bishop Santo Loku Pio
During Golden Jubilee Celebration in Kator, Juba.

Memories from the Golden Jubilee
In Kator, Juba

Giving a speech during the Golden Jubilee Celebration
At St Theresa Cathedral grounds, Kator.

Ukelo with young people at Moroyok

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We met with Fr. Joseph Ukelo to share a little insight about himself. Directed by Bishop Elect. Rt. Rev. Alex Lodiong Sakor. Performed by Fr. Joseph Ukello Yala. 2022.

Late Padre Joseph Ukelo Yala a South Sudanese Comboni Missionary speaks about Priesthood & Service. Directed by Komakech Kenyi 91. Performed by Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala. Jan 16, 2024.

Simon Lodai Amin Salvatore is a South Sudanese author and poet from Ikwoto County in Eastern Equatoria State. A Comboni Missionaries student of Philosophy at Tangaza University, he was awarded a certificate of outstanding academic excellence for the Year 2023-2024 by Tangaza University. He also received a certificate of participation in the annual Tangaza University Essay Writing Competition, an essay on the redefinition of leadership, as well as a certificate of participation in the Karim Poetic Contest 2025. Salvatore has previously worked as a Trainer for Conflict Resolution Education in Schools as well as a *Peace Bridges Project* which linked the children in South Sudan and the United States of America, under Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative, in Torit. Salvatore's background is a testimony to his interest in writing this book, rooted in the advocacy for peace, justice and women empowerment. He makes insightful reflections in this book in order to preserve the legacy of Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala.

Fr. Joseph Ukelo Yala, was a Comboni Missionary who lived his life advocating for Justice, Peace and Human dignity. He was a man of his word expressed by his motto, ***"Let your Yes be Yes and your No be No"***. Yala's ability to remain a happy missionary forms a bedrock of a life of resilience, and a shrewd search for truth, peace and justice. He believed only truth will win.

"I live by it, guided by it and all my life as a priest; my guardian is the word of God. To defend the rights of the voiceless, the rights of the suffering, the rights of the people of the South. And I feel really proud because I am fulfilled and I am happy being a priest, a Comboni missionary."